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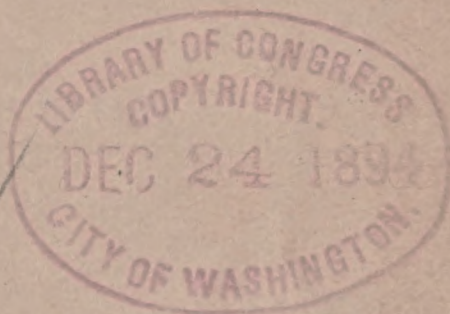
LOUISA AVONDALE;

OR,

TWO SOUTHERN GIRLS.

BY

ALICE V. CAREY.



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LOUISA AVONDALE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST LOUISA AVONDALE.

FOR nearly a quarter of a century a family feud had existed between the Avondales and the Meridiths, but the enmity was about to be broken by a member of each family in the ever old yet ever new way.

Handsome James Avondale had fallen in love with Louisa, the pride of the Meridith family. We find them on a lovely June day seated on a rustic bench in a remote corner of the Meridith plantation. The little nook was surrounded by beautiful trees, and the grass which covered the ground was like a velvety carpet ; such a spot seemed to have been fitted out by nature to be a lover's trysting place.

Louisa Meridith was a tall, slender girl, with large, dark, lustrous eyes, and that lovely complexion which is peculiar to Southern girls.

James Avondale, tall, handsome and gallant, bent over her, a wealth of love shining from his dark-brown eyes.

“Why not end this suspense at once, Louisa? Why do we need care about a foolish quarrel that happened in the long ago? If our ancestors saw fit to quarrel, there is no reason why we should live as enemies. Louisa, you may as well allow me to go to your father at once; if you will only consent to have me go, I will know his decision this very morning.”

“I know very well, James, it will be of no avail; he will not only refuse to give his consent, but his anger will know no bounds, for I have often heard that my father and yours were sworn enemies. I know that he will never consent for me to become your wife;” and pretty Louisa burst into tears.

“Come now, Wesa, crying will not help matters one bit; I will go right over to ‘Meridith Hall’ with you this morning, and have an interview with your father; if he refuses to give his consent, surely our engagement will not be broken. Promise me, Louisa, if he will not consent, that you will go over to Richmond to-night and marry me; after we shall have been married we will go to Europe, and remain

there until April, at least ; long ere that time your father will have forgiven you, and we will return to receive the parental benediction, and so on."

"Jimmie, dear, what air castles you are able to build," said Louisa, laughing as she arose. "Come along with me, papa is at home this morning, we may as well know his decision first as last. But James, dear, I have given you my promise, and I will not relent ; a Meridith never was known to break a promise."

"Then you agree to the proposition which I have just made?"

"Yes, dear, if papa refuses to give his consent, then I shall marry you against his will."

Together they crossed the fields to the grand mansion known as "Meridith Hall." One of the colored servants conducted Mr. Avondale to the library, where the master of the "Hall" generally spent the hours before noon. Louisa stood on the veranda, waiting for her lover to reappear and tell her the result of the interview.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Meridith, looking glaringly at the young man over the top of his gold-rimmed spectacles, at the same time wondering how young Avondale could have the presump-

tion to enter his house. "What can I do for you?"

Avondale came to the point at once: "Mr. Meridith, I have come here this morning to ask for the hand of your daughter in marriage. I love her, and she loves me in return; not only that, but I have wealth, and the family name of Avondale can be traced back with honor for nearly two centuries."

"Enough," cut in the old gentleman, "I do not wish to hear you further. Let me tell you once for all that you, an Avondale, shall never be in any way connected with the family of Meridith."

Young Avondale did not lose his temper, but only said: "May I ask why?"

"I have no right to be questioned by you, young man, and you will do me a favor by leaving my house this very minute."

"Very well, Mr. Meridith, I will leave your house, but before I do leave allow me to remind you that, 'all is fair in love and war.' I shall have your daughter for my wife if I have to steal her."

"That would not be at all surprising; stealing is a trait peculiar to the Avondale race," declared the old man. "And if you persist in

loitering about here, forcing your insolence upon me, I shall call the servants, who will oblige you to leave in a hurry."

A flash of anger crossed the young man's countenance at the gross insult which the old man had just offered. But he stayed the angry words which arose to his lips, because the man who had so grossly insulted him was advanced in years, and what was more, he did not forget that he was talking to Louisa's father. So instead of giving vent to angry words, which would only have made matters worse, young Avondale left the room, and the old man was alone to nurse his rage.

Louisa knew, by her lover's countenance, when he rejoined her on the veranda, what had been the result of the interview. "I knew it, James," she said, her large, dark eyes filling with tears.

"Never mind, Louisa, all will yet be well. Meet me in the grounds to-night about ten. I will have a carriage near at hand; we will drive over to Richmond and be married. Then, my pretty dear, no human power can separate us. Good-by, my dear, for the present." And he was soon out of sight, leaving poor Louisa alone on the veranda, wondering if her papa was really very angry.

After Avondale left the room, old Mr. Meridith violently pulled the bell-rope. A frightened darky put in appearance. The servants knew full well when their master was angry, by the violent way in which he would jerk the bells which led to their quarters.

“Where is Miss Louisa?”

“Dunno, massa.”

“Well, go find her, and tell her that I wish to see her at once. Be off in a hurry; don’t stand staring like an idiot.”

The frightened representative of the African race took himself off in a hurry, and poor Louisa was soon standing tremblingly in the presence of her father.

“Well, Miss Meridith, so you have been holding clandestine meetings with James Avondale, and dared allow him to come here and ask for your hand in marriage. That was not all, but the young scoundrel added insult to injury by declaring that he would steal you if he could not get you in any other way. An honorable confession for a young gentleman to make. Louisa, I am grieved and shocked at the idea of you allowing this disgraceful affair to reach such a height as this. I refused to give my consent, and I forbid you to have any-

thing more to do with James Avondale. Louisa Meridith, you are never to become his wife."

"Papa! papa!" cried the trembling girl, "may I ask what makes James Avondale so heinous in your estimation?"

"There are grave reasons, my daughter, why I should look upon his father's son with contempt; for a quarter of a century the Avondales and Meridiths have been enemies."

"But, papa, the offense was surely not so great as to relieve us of our obligation to forgive. You know, papa dear, 'we must forgive to be forgiven.'"

"Never!" thundered the old gentleman, as he brought his fist down with tremendous force upon his writing-desk. "Never can I forgive a man who openly and above board acted the part of a rascal toward me and mine; and now for his son to commence encroachments, is indeed aggravating in the extreme. No doubt he wishes to secure more of the Meridith fortune by aspiring for your hand in marriage, but I shall see that not another penny of the Meridiths' shall be enjoyed by an Avondale."

"Why, papa, I don't understand you; please

explain to me the cause of you and old Mr. Avondale becoming such bitter enemies."

"Why, girl, I thought you knew. James Avondale's father obtained fifty thousand dollars' worth of coal land from the Avondale estate by unjust means. You know, as well as I, that the Avondale estate joins ours, though 'Mosslands' (the name of James Avondale's home) is seven miles from here. There is a strip of land lying between the two estates which belonged to the Meridiths, and was always accepted as the dividing line. Little notice was taken of the piece of land until coal was discovered near here, the principal vein of which lay under the aforesaid strip of land. James Avondale's father laid claim to it; of course I opposed him, and we went to law. But even in the courts of justice cases are often decided in favor of the wrong party. It was so in this case, for Avondale won the suit, by dishonest means of course; there can be no question to that; every one with a conscience knew that he stole that strip of land from us, which was worth at least fifty thousand dollars. Think of that, and consider, my daughter, of the step you have taken, by promising to link the grand old name of Meridith

with disgrace and dishonor by promising to become the wife of a man whose father was nothing more than a common thief."

"But, papa, how can you blame James Avondale for that which is no fault of his. He is good and noble, papa, and no matter what can be said of his ancestors I love him still, and what is more, I have promised to become his wife, and I will not relent."

"Then leave my presence, you disobedient girl, and remain away from me until you have given the matter more thought, when I am sure you will be ashamed of your conduct. In the meantime I shall order the darkies to use a rifle on Mr. James Avondale if he is seen loitering about the premises."

Louisa sought the solitude of her own room, where she spent the remaining part of the day almost crying herself into hysterics. She did not go down to luncheon at noon. Louisa Meridith was not a disobedient girl; never before had she thought of going against her father's will, yet there was no other alternative. He would not consent to have her marry the man of her choice, and the thought of losing her lover was maddening to poor Louisa.

As soon as Louisa left the library, old Mr.

Meridith gave the servants' bell-rope another violent jerk. "Tell Mammy Chloe I wish to see her at once," he proclaimed to the colored boy who had answered the summons.

In less time than it takes to tell it Mammy Chloe stood in her master's presence.

"Chloe," he began, "you have been a trusty old servant of the Meridith family for many years. You were Miss Louisa's nurse, were you not?"

"Yes, massa."

"And of course you love her very much?" he asked, scrutinizing her countenance closely.

"I do lub her, massa, de deah honey."

"Well, Mammy Chloe, you are to keep a close watch upon her from this time on. If she wishes you to mail letters for her, be sure to bring them to me before giving them to the postman. Do not carry letters to James Avondale for her under any consideration, and watch carefully that she does not send them by any of the colored boys; and if you see Avondale lurking about the premises, let me know at once, so as I can turn the hounds loose upon him. Now, are you sure that you understand all that I have told you?"

"Yes, massa."

“Well, Chloe, I have still more for you to do. When Miss Louisa retires to her room to-night, and every night from now on until you receive orders from me to discontinue the practice, you are to lock her door from the outside, taking care to unlock it early in the morning. If she happens to hear you lock the door and objects to your doing so, tell her that you are merely carrying out master’s orders; but you must try, if possible, to lock it without her hearing you.”

“Yes, massa.”

“Now, Chloe, you may go; but bear in mind that I mean for you to carry out my instructions to the letter.”

When Chloe entered her room late in the afternoon, she found her pretty, tear-stained face upturned, her troubles drowned in deep slumber. Old Chloe stood by the bedside, gazing lovingly down upon the sleeping girl. But the strange sensation which comes over us when another is gazing fixedly upon us, causing us to look—a sensation which we have all more or less experienced—came over Louisa, and she awoke.

“Oh, Mammy Chloe, how long have I slept, pray?”

"I doesn't know, honey ; but, bress de Lawd, what am de cause ob dis tear-stained face? Youse jess been cryin' your pretty self heart-sick. De pillow am all wet wid tears."

"Mammy Chloe, does papa seem to be very angry?"

"From de way he jerks de bell-rope he must be berry angry."

"Oh, Mammy Chloe, I am so miserable!"

"La, honey, dis won't do! Whatever youse did dat am so very naughty, Massa Meridith will done soon forget about it. Mars Robert has come from de chase, and done brought a splendid deer dat he done shot. Now git up and dress for dinner, dere's a good honey."

The kind words of the old darky were soothing to Louisa after the distressing scenes of the morning.

Louisa arose and arranged her toilet before going down to meet her brother Robert, who had been gone on a hunting expedition for several days. Louisa was extremely glad that he had gotten home, because she loved him dearly, and did not like the idea of going away so far without seeing him once more.

Little did Louisa think that when she bade her brother adieu that evening that it was the

last time they would see each other in this world. But "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." Louisa wore her prettiest evening-dress, and was down in time to have a chat with her brother before the dinner-bell rang.

Robert Meridith was glad to see his little sister, for he well knew that she was the bright star of their home. Louisa took care not to mention the event of the morning to her brother. She also sincerely hoped that her papa would not mention the affair to Rob during the evening—he would know all about it after she had gone. She wished him to remember the last evening they could spend together for many months as being a very pleasant one. And it was well she did, for Robert Meridith remembered his sister in all the long years which followed as looking more beautiful and gay on that particular evening than ever he had known her to look in all her life before.

When old Mr. Meridith came in to dinner he took in at a glance that his daughter was in fine spirits and looking her best, and began at once to hope that she was already beginning to forget about that which he was pleased to term, in his own mind, "her shattered love-dream."

To Louisa's intense surprise her father was more pleasant and talkative during the evening than she had known him to be for some time. While Louisa was wondering at the sudden change in her father's demeanor, the old gentleman was secretly congratulating himself on his skill in governing his children.

During the evening she delighted her father and brother by singing many beautiful Southern songs, and when she arose from before the piano she kissed them both good-night at least a half dozen times. Little did they think that, instead of good-night, it meant good-by forever.

"If only dear brother Paul were here until I could see him once more before leaving, I would certainly feel more satisfied. Dear brother Robert, and dear papa, he will miss me more than any one, but it is his own fault; he might just as well try to kill me as to try and separate me from my lover." Such was Louisa Meridith's line of thought as she mounted the broad staircase which led to her room. "But there is no use to worry. I know papa will have forgiven me before I am halfway across the dark-blue sea."

Old Chloe formed some pretext for going to

Louisa's room, and Louisa was very glad she came, for she wished to see old Chloe once more—the faithful old darky who had taken care of her from infancy, Mrs. Meridith having died when Louisa was only three months old.

Chloe managed to be closing and locking the door just as the great hall clock chimed the half hour after nine. The sound produced by the clock drowned the sound of the lock turning in the door, and Louisa did not know that she was a prisoner.

Louisa listened until the last sound of the old woman's footsteps died away, when she began to make a few necessary preparations for the journey which was ahead of her. She selected a pretty dark-red costume from her wardrobe, suitable for a wedding gown and a traveling-dress.

Having completed her preparations, Louisa turned out the light, and sat down by the window. The Southern moon was rising above the horizon, and the sky was alive with stars—not a cloud marred the beauty of the scene.

“What a lovely night,” thought Louisa. “My wedding night is certainly a lovely one. Thank goodness, I need have no dismal forebodings as far as the weather is concerned.”

As Louisa sat musing the clock in the hall struck ten. The words of her lover returned to her like a flash: "Meet me in the grounds about ten." She arose and crossed the room without hesitation, but to her intense surprise the door would not yield an inch—it was locked, and locked from the outside.

The question which presented itself to Louisa at once was, "How on earth came the door locked, and who locked it?" She was a prisoner. She returned to her place by the window, and began to devise a plan to escape. Suddenly the thick vine which climbed up past her window, and which was really strong enough to bear the weight of a man, attracted her notice. "Just the very thing," thought Louisa, and the old adage, "that love laughs at locks and bars," crossed her memory.

As she sat gazing out of the window, she fancied she saw some one moving about among the shubbery across the lawn from her window. After watching intently for several minutes she recognized the handsome form of her lover.

"Mr. Ayondale," she called gently, fearful lest some one within might hear her.

"It is I, Louisa," he answered, after he stood directly under her window.

"I am a prisoner in this room, James, but I can escape by means of this friendly vine."

Louisa did not wait to hear his reply, but threw her satchel down, and stepped without hesitation into the branches of the vine. Mr. Avondale scarcely breathed as he watched her make the descent, fearing every moment that she might be hurled to a dreadful death right before his eyes, but, of course, nothing of the kind happened. A half hour later they were standing in the parlor of a minister in the suburbs of Richmond. The minister's wife and son were called in to act as witnesses, and in a few minutes the words which made James Avondale and Louisa Meridith man and wife were uttered. After receiving the congratulations of the good minister and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Avondale made haste to catch the midnight train for New York.

Louisa did not send any word home until she reached New York, when she wrote the following letter to her father way down at her old Virginia home:

"NEW YORK CITY, June 24, 1859.

"MY DARLING PAPA: When this letter reaches you I shall be far away, and I know

that when my own dear papa reads this he will forgive me—his only daughter.

“My only means of escape, when I found myself locked in my room, was to climb down the old vine which runs past my room window.

“Mr. Avondale awaited me in the grounds; we then went to the nearest minister and were married. After we were married we came straight to New York, from which place I now write. To-morrow morning we sail for Europe. I could not leave New York without sending a missive to the loved ones at my dear old Virginia home. I cannot hope for an answer to this letter, but I shall write you as soon as we arrive in Europe, and we shall stay long enough at the place from which I shall write to receive a reply from you. My best love to you, dear papa. Please remember me, with loving words, to my dear brothers, Rob and Paul.

“Now adieu, dear papa; when this letter reaches you I shall be far out on the dark-blue sea. Your ever loving daughter,

“LOUISA MERIDITH AVONDALE.”

CHAPTER II.

THE MISSING DAUGHTER.

ON THE morning after Louisa's departure old Mr. Meridith and his son Robert sat at the breakfast-table wondering why Louisa did not put in her appearance. Suddenly the elderly gentleman's patience deserted him, and he ordered Chloe to tell her young mistress that the gentlemen were patiently waiting for her to take her place at the head of the table.

Chloe soon reappeared in dismay, crying and wringing her hands. "Oh! Mars Meridith, Miss Wesa has done gone, she's done 'loped, she has, mars. De doah was locked from de outside, but her bed has not been used, and she done 'scaped somehow; she's done gone, Massa Meridith."

An exciting scene followed. All the darkies were attracted to the dining-room by old Chloe's cries. When they heard old Chloe re-

peating that "Miss Louisa was done gone," they misunderstood the meaning of the old darky's words. They all thought that the fair young girl, who had been so kind to them all, was dead. Then the uproar began in earnest. Robert Meridith had to use almost main force to get the servants back to their quarters, before he could have matters explained to him, for we well know he had not heard a word of the happenings of the morning previous. Old Mr. Meridith explained all to Robert.

"But, father," said the young man, "why did you object to Louisa marrying young Avondale. I am sure he is wealthy and of a good family."

"Robert Meridith," thundered the old man, "would you countenance the marriage of your beautiful sister with the son of a common thief, the son of a man who ought to have served a lifelong term in the penitentiary?"

"I never heard the like said of Mr. Avondale before. I know, of course, that you and he were by no means friendly. As for the money which you claim he stole from you, that was settled upon him by the strength of the law; his son is not to blame for that. I have always found young Avondale to be an honorable and

courteous gentleman. He is just the type of manhood which I most admire. I really have no regrets to offer on account of his having won my beautiful sister's love."

"You have queer taste in selecting a husband for your sister, Robert Meridith. By your decision you have only added that much more gall to my already bitter cup of misery I think I have one child yet—Paul. I am sure that when he hears of this most disgraceful affair he will consider James Avondale the villain that he really is. I have been failing in health for some time, and I know that my days are almost numbered. Paul shall be my heir. An Avondale, or a friend of an Avondale, shall never inherit one penny of the Meridith wealth."

"Very well, father, that is your affair to settle, not mine," said Robert as he sauntered from the room.

It did not take Robert long to ascertain his sister's means of escape, and although he knew perfectly well that he would miss his pretty little sister very much, he also knew that there would certainly be no sense in crying and lamenting over spilt milk. Robert Meridith possessed an amiable disposition, always ready to make the best of everything.

In his favorite sport—hunting—Robert forgot all the ills of this life. He accordingly prepared himself for another week's sport with his friends, and as he went down the broad avenue which led from his home to the public highway, with his gun thrown across his shoulder, and a well-filled knapsack on his back, he whistled a tune which made him feel the gayest of the gay, although his thoughts would occasionally run in unpleasant directions.

“If father disinherits me, I am sure I can take the money left me by my mother and go into business somewhere. I am sure it will not break my heart because I am not destined to become a millionaire. And what is more, many an honorable young man has begun life in poverty; there is one thing certain, money cannot buy happiness. At any rate,” thought Rob, with a toss of his head, “I am strong enough to earn my own living, if necessary, by hard work. As for Louisa, she does not need any more than she has, I am sure. So drive on, old gentleman, give your money to whomsoever you please.”

Robert Meridith was a proud young man. He had all the pride for which the young

Virginians of that time were noted. He was not only brave and proud, but he was most earnest in following the dictates of a good conscience, which it was his good fortune to possess.

As soon as old Mr. Meridith learned that his son had gone on a hunting expedition he ordered Shiloh, the colored boy, to ride over to Richmond and tell Mr. Maddox, the lawyer for the Meridith estate, to put in appearance some time during the day.

Of course Mr. Maddox appeared on the scene in due time, and was ushered into the presence of the eccentric old gentleman.

"Mr. Maddox," he began, "I feel myself failing in health here lately, and as I am affected with that dreadful disease of the heart, which is likely to bring my life to a close at any moment, therefore I deem it necessary to have my worldly affairs settled at once. My object in sending for you to-day is concerning my will. I wish to make a new one. The one I made some time ago does not accord with my wishes now. There are some changes to be made, and as there is danger in delay, they had better be made as quickly as practicable."

"Very well, sir," said the lawyer politely, "I am at your service."

In a short time a new will, which disinherited Robert and Louisa, leaving Paul sole heir to the estate, was made.

Mr. Maddox did not venture to question the old gentleman as to the cause of changing his will so suddenly, but was really glad when his business at the hall was over, for a time at least.

Robert did not return from the chase for almost a week, and of course he knew nothing of the lawyer's visit. He saw but little of his father, who avoided poor Rob as much as possible, having his meals in the library when Robert happened to be at home, which was seldom. Robert found life at the "Hall" very dull after his sister had gone.

It was almost a week after Louisa's departure when Chloe entered the library and handed Louisa's letter to her master. Old Mr. Meridith read the letter with a lowering brow, then tore it to pieces and consigned it to the waste basket.

"Her promised letter from Europe shall perish in like manner, if it ever reaches its destination," thought the irate old gentleman.

"She need not sue for forgiveness now, after going intentionally against my will."

A half-hour later he received another letter. It was from Paul, his younger son, who was pursuing his studies at the University of Virginia.

He informed his father that in several days he would graduate with high honors. But instead of going directly home, after finishing his course of study, he would go to Georgia with a surveying party, and how long the intended trip would detain him from reaching home he did not know.

Paul Meridith had as yet heard nothing of his sister's elopement, for in those days news did not spread as quickly as it does at the present time. So of course, as he knew nothing of the affair, nothing concerning Louisa was mentioned in the letter to his father.

Mr. Meridith, however, firmly believed that Paul had heard of his sister's elopement, but had too much respect for his father to mention the disgraceful affair, or to allude to it in any way.

Of Louisa's letter Robert knew nothing. Had she written to Rob as well as her father she would have received an answer, and no

doubt affairs would have been entirely different in after years.

Several days later Robert received a letter from his brother, which was quite a providential happening for Robert to know his address.

Mr. Meridith looked forward to his younger son's arrival with many pleasant anticipations, but alas ! it was a pleasure which was not in store for him.

Mr. Meridith had for years been an early riser. One morning about a month after Louisa's departure Chloe took his breakfast into the library, but to her great surprise he was not there. She went to his room door and rapped. On receiving no answer she turned the door-knob, thinking perhaps he had gone down into the grounds to enjoy an early morning walk.

But the door was locked, and from the inside, for on looking into the keyhole she could see the key.

Mr. Robert was informed of the strange affair. He rapped and called, and on receiving no answer ordered the door to be broken in, and what a dreadful and trying moment it was for poor Rob. There lay his father, with his

right arm thrown across his head, apparently asleep, but in reality quite dead. The master of "Meridith Hall" was no more. He had crossed the river to the great beyond some time during the night.

"Father dead and Louisa gone, I know not whither! What strange things have come upon us here lately," thought poor Rob as he sank into a chair, feeling as if he were turning into stone.

An inquest was held over the remains, and the doctors declared that James Hastings Meridith came to his death by an attack of heart disease, with which the family physician declared he had been troubled for years.

Paul was summoned, and arrived at his sorrow-stricken home as quickly as possible, for in those days one could not travel as quickly nor as easily as now.

Paul had not been apprised of his sister's elopement until he reached home.

"And have you no idea, or at least a clue of some kind, as to her whereabouts?" asked Paul.

"A Richmond paper stated that they were married at the residence of Rev. Mr. some one—I can't remember the name—and that

they started for Europe as soon as the ceremony was performed. As far as my knowledge extends, she has not written a line home since she left."

The two brothers knew that it would be worse than useless to attempt to find their sister's whereabouts.

On the day following Paul's arrival, all that was mortal of old Mr. Meridith was laid to rest in the little churchyard of St. Jude beside his wife, who had long since been laid away in her last resting-place.

It was indeed with heavy hearts that Rob and Paul returned to their grand old home after their father's obsequies. They knew full well that they would find on their return no father to sustain them, no gentle sister to comfort them.

Several days after their father's interment, the two young men were seated in the library, when old Chloe entered and handed them several visiting-cards, one of which bore the name of Maddox, well known to them as their father's lawyer.

"Show them into the library, Chloe," said Rob.

In a few minutes the lawyer and several

other gentlemen put in their appearance. Mr. Maddox shook hands with Rob and Paul, saying :

“I hope you young gentlemen will pardon me for coming here before the first few days of mourning have passed away, but I am doing directly as your father ordered me to act. He ordered me to read his will, not later than three days after his funeral, to at least two of his children, if it should be impossible for the other one to be present.”

“Proceed, sir,” said Robert ; “it really is impossible for my sister to be present to-day, because she is on the other side of the Atlantic.”

The will was then read, and Robert found himself, as well as his sister, disinherited.

Paul was very angry at the idea of his brother and sister being treated so unjustly.

Robert was neither angry nor disappointed, but a little surprised at how quickly his father had carried out his threats.

No amount of persuasion on the part of any one could induce Robert to take his portion out of the estate.

Paul offered his brother that portion of the wealth which would rightly have been his if

there had been no will and the law had been left to settle the affair. He also said he would give his sister her share if Robert would accept his portion.

When Paul made the above-named proposition Rob promptly said: "No, brother, it shall be according to father's wishes; the wealth was his, and, of course, it must go as he wished it should. I am by no means a poor man; I have the money left me by my mother. I shall take that and invest it in some profitable business. As for sister Louisa, she has the Avondale wealth. It would really be an insult to James Avondale to offer her portion to them. Take my advice, Paul, and leave matters rest as they now are."

"But, Robert, what is it that you intend doing?" asked Paul.

"South American coffee plantations are good investments just now—I think I shall try my luck in one of them," said Robert.

"Well, Robert, Louisa will live at "Mosslands" (the home of James Avondale), "on her return. I can get a large sum of money for 'Meridith Hall;' what do you think of my selling it, and accompanying you to South America?"

“I am perfectly satisfied, brother; it seems to me that if we can be near each other that everything will go on better for us.”

“Very well, then,” said Paul, “I shall go, and what is more we shall not delay, but just as soon as we can settle up affairs here we will start for South America. No doubt before that time we will hear something of Louisa.”

But no word from her, whom they both loved so well, reached them during the remaining time they were in Virginia.

Lovely “Meridith Hall” was soon in the hands of strangers, and Robert and Paul on their way to a distant land.

Before leaving, Rob and Paul told the good people who had bought their home to keep in their possession all letters that came addressed to the Meridiths, and to give them to Mrs. Avondale when she returned to “Mosslands.”

CHAPTER III.

LOUISA'S RETURN.

LOUISA wrote many letters to those who were near and dear to her at her old Virginia home. Of course she received no answer. She concluded at last that they were all angry with her. Pride came to her rescue—she would not write another line to them as long as they were determined to be so unforgiving.

Louisa and Mr. Avondale traveled through England, Germany, France and Spain during the first six months they had spent abroad, and now they were spending Christmas tide, the time of year dear to all Christians, in

“The land where orange blossoms bloom,
And oranges like gold in leafy gloom,”

lovely Italy.

Louisa was delighted with Naples, and as she was by this time heartily tired with travel,

determined to spend several months in the quaint old city.

The last of March found our tourists on their way to Havana, Cuba. They had visited Genoa, the birthplace of Columbus, so on their homeward journey they determined to see his last resting place.

On the first night of her stay in Havana she had a strange dream. She fancied she was back at her dear old Virginia home, that as she stood on the veranda she saw her father reel and fall like a drunken man as he walked down the broad avenue or drive, which led from the "Hall" to the public road. She saw the servants standing about in groups, crying and wailing, while her two brothers bent over him weeping bitterly.

On awaking she made up her mind to know something from home before leaving Havana. She would write to her father's lawyer, Mr. Maddox. Why had she not thought of him before! He could at least inform her whether or not her father and brothers were well.

Louisa Avondale feverishly awaited the lawyer's reply.

Mr. Maddox was much surprised when he received the letter, and lost no time in giving her the desired information.

"A letter for madame," said a little Spanish servant with a bow, as she entered the breakfast-room one morning, where Mr. and Mrs. Avondale were enjoying a cup of chocolate.

Louisa's heart gave a great bound of joy as she recognized the writing of her father's lawyer. She hastily tore the letter open, little dreaming of the dreadful news which it contained.

RICHMOND, Va., March 16, 1860.

"ESTEEMED MADAME: Deep indeed was my agitation as I perused the contents of your letter.

"I thought surely that you had been apprised, long ere now, of the great change which has been effected at your old home.

"One morning, about six weeks after your departure, your father was found dead in bed, having died some time during the night.

"The physicians declare he died of heart disease, with which he had been troubled for many years.

"The entire estate was left to your brother Paul, who sold all the property, viz., the Meridith plantation, and your two brothers are now in South America.

"As I have no correspondence with them, I cannot give you their address.

"Yours very respectfully,

"ARTHUR MADDUX."

"Oh, God, how dreadful!" moaned the grief-stricken lady, as she handed the letter to Mr. Avondale.

From the very hour in which she received the lawyer's letter Louisa Avondale was a different woman.

She drooped like a broken lily, the roses left her pretty cheeks, and in their stead a hectic flush occasionally came and went. Poor Mr. Avondale soon saw his lovely young wife in the hands of that dreadful monster, hasty consumption.

Mr. Avondale lost no time in resuming their journey homeward after they had received the letter which bore them such sorrowful news.

They arrived at lovely "Mosslands" about the middle of April, at which time of the year all nature in the valley of Virginia begins to put on a spring-time garb of beauty.

The meadows at "Mosslands" were covered with flowers—pretty little wild flowers—while the lawn and flower gardens about "Mosslands" were most beautiful, yet poor Louisa was not able to take either pride or pleasure in any of the luxuries or beauties by which she was surrounded.

Mr. Avondale offered to take her for a drive over to "Meridith Hall," but she declared that the sight of her dear old home, in the hands of strangers, would break her heart entirely.

Rob and Paul had not allowed Chloe to be sold with the rest of the slaves, but bade her go to Miss Louisa—as she still persisted in calling her—when she returned to "Mosslands."

One morning, shortly after Louisa's return, she was delighted to see old Chloe coming up the drive, and when Louisa learned that the old darky had come to stay she almost cried for joy.

One morning in June, two months after their return, a little dark-eyed stranger lay in the cradle at "Mosslands."

But the young and beautiful mother of that strange little bundle of humanity lay stiff and cold in death.

Poor Mr. Avondale was almost wild at the loss of his lovely wife. His only source of comfort was the little baby girl who, Chloe declared, "was de libing image of Miss Wesa, when she was an infant of de same size."

The little girl was at once named Louisa

Meridith Avondale. Chloe at once assumed charge of the little stranger, whom we shall know from now on as Louisa Avondale.

Mrs. Avondale was also laid to rest in the little churchyard of St. Jude, beside her father and mother. A great many of her ancestors were buried there, it having been the family burying-ground of the Meridiths and Avondales for many, many years.

CHAPTER IV.

ROBERT AND PAUL.

ROBERT and Paul Meridith read an account of their sister's death in a Richmond paper, which stated that she had died of hasty consumption. They, of course, concluded that she had died childless, and thinking that Mr. Avondale would soon forget their sister and marry again, they did not think it necessary to commence a correspondence with him.

Robert and Paul took their sister's death greatly to heart, for they loved her dearly. They considered that her death broke the last loving tie which bound them to their native land, and they almost resolved never to return to the United States again.

The Meridith boys were very successful in their South American investments: their coffee crops yielded them splendid profits; a gold mine was discovered under Robert's plantation, which made him the richest man in the

regions. His wealth caused him to be much sought after by the French and English families who lived in the neighborhood, especially those who had marriageable daughters, but Robert had fully resolved to become a bachelor.

Paul, on the other hand, had long since wooed and wedded a Spanish maiden, whose eyes were as dark as night, and whom Paul always declared reminded him of his dear sister Louisa.

Dark-eyed children soon blessed the home of Paul. There were Rob and Paul, Jr., aged four, little Louisa and baby Virginia, whom Paul had named in memory of his native state.

As the children grew older they, as well as their mother, loved to listen to their father and uncle talk of their native land, life in Brazil being quite different from life in the United States.

The children loved Uncle Robert, he was so good and kind, and brought them so many curious things when he would return from the West Indies, where his business affairs often called him.

Little Robert, who was the namesake of Rob, Sr., was about old enough to begin to have the spirit of adventure; he often ex-

pressed a wish to go to Cuba. One evening he electrified the company by telling them that "he had a great mind to make a visit to Cuba himself, if no one would go with him, and you may bet when I become a man I shall pay a visit to 'Meridith Hall,' way up in Virginia."

"Bravo," said Uncle Robert, "that is the way I like to hear a lad of twelve years talk. I go to Havana next week, and I shall take you along. No, Paul, you need not look disappointed, you are to go also; do you think Uncle Robert would slight you in a matter of this kind?"

To say that the youngsters enjoyed their trip to Havana would be putting it in a mild sort of a way. They were delighted with the voyage, delighted with the city of Havana, which was the first city they had ever visited. Their trip was perfectly delightful, returning to Brazil with many little mementoes of their visit to the quaint old city.

Uncle Rob took care not to allow the boys to forget their mother and little sisters while they were away. He had them purchase many little presents for them, such presents as delight the hearts of women and little girls.

Louisa Meridith was named in memory of her aunt Louisa, but she greatly resembled her grandma Meridith, while little Virginia was the living image of her aunt Louisa. The same caused her to be a great favorite of uncle Rob's, who fairly deluged her with presents whenever he returned from a visit to the West Indies.

CHAPTER V.

LADY VS. ADVENTURESS.

ALONG the coast at Cape May, old Haidee, the gypsy hag, was calling to every one who passed her: "Good fortunes to tell; good fortunes to tell; only hear the future, kind lady."

She had been singing and calling out the above-named words until her throat became sore, yet no one heeded her. She resolved to try another plan.

As Banker Stewart's haughty wife and pretty daughter passed along the promenade, Haidee completely barred the way. "Have your fortune read, dear lady," she said, addressing Miss Stewart; "it will only cost you a silver dollar, lady; a nice fortune is yours, my dear; let old Haidee read the lines in the palm of your hand."

Ida Stewart only laughed and was about to pass on, when the old gypsy arrested her at-

tention still further by offering her two little round balls about the size and shape of peas, one being pink and the other white. She told Miss Stewart that she would give them to her for nothing, but that she would expect her reward after the curious little balls performed the work which she promised of them.

As Haidee did not ask her to pay for them Ida Stewart took the balls to get rid of the gypsy's nonsense. Haidee explained to her that the pink one would gain for her the love of any man to whom she could administer it unawares, but if the victim should happen to know, or in any way detect, the cause of her influence over him, that the charm would be broken; but as long as the secret could be kept the love produced would be long and lasting, making the victim perfectly subservient to her will.

The white ball would produce death in such a manner that the best physicians in the land would declare that death was caused by heart disease.

"But mind you," said the gypsy, "if ever you use the balls successfully I shall know of it, no matter if I happen to be in Africa at the time you use them, then I shall be on hand to claim my reward."

Ida placed the little balls in her purse, thinking she would never use them, and, after tossing the gypsy a quarter, moved on with the great mass of human beings who daily promenaded along the beach at Cape May.

Ida Stewart never dreamed of using Haidee's drugs, but the wily gypsy gave a low, mocking laugh, not pleasant to listen to, when Ida was past hearing distance. The old gypsy knew that a young girl, and most especially a young girl who moved in fashionable society, had many lovers, and just as many rivals. She knew well who the girl was who had the little balls—the only daughter of a Philadelphia millionaire, Banker Stewart's daughter, and only child. Haidee resolved to keep an eye on her movements, and we shall see later on how she carried out that resolve.

It is the latter part of July. The Philadelphia papers are filled with the account of the approaching marriage of Banker Stewart's daughter to Count Du Varri, of France, a most excellent gentleman. The marriage could not be put off until September and October, the fashionable months for weddings, on account of the prospective groom having to return to his estates in France as quickly as possible.

Dame Rumor had it that he loved Miss Stewart devotedly, and that when she would become Countess Du Varri she would be most happy.

At last the long-looked-for morning was at hand. The gay four hundred were present to witness the ceremony and attend the reception. The ceremony was soon performed, and Ida Stewart became Countess Du Varri. At the gay reception which followed no one noticed the troubled look and ashen pallor which would at times cross Banker Stewart's face. No, he would not allow any one present to know by word or sign that he was bankrupt.

During the few weeks which his wife and daughter had spent at Cape May he had spent upon them what might have been called a small fortune; but what did that matter, since his beautiful daughter, who he felt sure could not endure poverty—she who had been lolled in the lap of luxury all her lifetime. So what mattered it about the money spent at Cape May, since she had made such a good catch. Before the news of the bank failure will have been made known my beautiful daughter shall have already been a pretty good distance out at sea, and no doubt before she pays a visit to

America I shall have been able to redeem myself, and his honor, the count, will never know of the failure. Such was the banker's line of thought as he stood in the grand old parlor among his guests.

While the countess was in her room donning her traveling-costume the count was enjoying a walk up and down the street in front of the Stewart mansion, when a newsboy stepped up to him, exclaiming :

"Paper, sir!—containing a full account of the great Stewart bank failure!"

The count was almost thunderstruck. He bought a paper and read for himself an account of his father-in-law's failure. He wrote a note and gave the newsboy a dime to deliver it to the Countess Du Varri. The count then hurried to a shop, procured a disguise, and in a few hours' time was landed safe in Jersey City.

Meantime the countess had descended to the parlor, was seated on a divan chatting pleasantly with her fashionable friends and awaiting the count's return, thinking of course that he had also gone to his rooms to don his traveling-suit.

As the time rolled rapidly round, and the

count failed to put in an appearance, old Mr. Stewart began to get uneasy, and was just about to go in search of his missing son-in-law when the servant handed the countess a note. She read the note and fell in an unconscious heap upon the floor. Mr. Stewart then knew that something serious must have happened to the groom, and picked up the note, which read as follows :

“TO THE COUNTESS DU VARRI: No doubt you have heard ere this of your father's failure. Excuse me for being plain when I tell you that you are not a countess at all. I am no more a count than the newsboy who brings you this note. I married you for your money. Now that you are penniless I see fit to desert you. A wealthy wife would be bother enough, I imagine, and a poor one would be a much greater nuisance. So now farewell, my dear countess. I wish you bon voyage on your wedding tour. Please remember me as your earnest admirer.

“COUNT DU VARRI.”

Great beads of perspiration covered old Mr. Stewart's face as he read the note, then a deathlike pallor overspread his face, and he fell heavily to the floor.

As Ida was recovering from the deep swoon

into which she had fallen, she could hear her mother calling piteously to her that her papa was dying. Servants were running hither and thither with restoratives, but ere a physician arrived old Mr. Stewart was dead; death being caused by undue mental excitement, and an already overtaxed nervous system.

Hardly had old Mr. Stewart been laid away in the tomb when his creditors took possession of the costly household furniture, and all the property which Mr. Stewart owned, turning Ida and Mrs. Stewart into the street without money or shelter, and finding themselves at once deserted by their fashionable friends, they, who had been reared in luxury all their lives, were obliged to come down to tenement life.

“Mother,” said Ida, “we must look for employment of some kind; we can’t sit way up here in this rickety old building and starve; we can’t, indeed.”

Suiting the action to the words, Ida arrayed herself in a cheap mourning-dress, covering her face with a thick black veil, and went out to seek employment. As she hurried along, she met many friends of happier days, but not

one of them recognized in the plain, dark-robed figure the lovely and accomplished daughter of Banker Stewart.

Ida went from one place of business to another, receiving the same dismal reply wherever she went, viz., no more employees needed. As a last resource before retracing her steps homeward she purchased a newspaper, hoping to find something worth while in the want column, but she was too tired and heartsick to look at the paper before going home.

On arriving home Ida scanned the want column until she came to the following lines:

“WANTED.—Two ladies who can speak French fluently, and are proficient in music and the usual English branches, to act as governesses for a little boy and girl. No references required. Address Fairlawn, — Co., Va.”

“Mother, that is the very thing for us; we can speak French fluently. I was only twelve when papa took you and I to France, yet I remember the ways of the French people as distinctly as if I were among them only yesterday. And as for music, I can manage that. I shall apply for the place at once, mother. There is no harm in trying for it, you know.

We can use an assumed name, some name that will sound very Frenchy—Trillcott, for instance. Now I really think that Madame and Mademoiselle Trillcott will sound very well."

"What a head you have for plotting," said Mrs. Stewart. "Do as you wish about answering it, my daughter."

Ida lost no time in applying for the place. Fortune favored her. In several days she received a letter from Fairlawn, which stated that Mr. and Mrs. Montague would be pleased to have Madame and Mademoiselle Trillcott commence their teaching at Fairlawn by the first of the month.

It is needless to say that the letter brought joy to the hearts of Ida and Mrs. Stewart, both being anxious to leave Philadelphia, and the scenes of their former happy days, far in the background.

CHAPTER VI.

LOUISA AVONDALE AGAIN.

THIRTEEN years have come and gone since Mrs. Avondale's death. James Avondale and his daughter still reside at "Mosslands."

Little Louisa has grown to be the living image of her mother. She had her mother's gentle ways, her mother's voice, her mother's looks. On account of the great resemblance which she bore to her mother, James Avondale loved to gaze upon his lovely little daughter, for she brought back to him sweet memories of bygone days.

He was loath to give up his pretty companion, but the time had arrived when she would be obliged to go away to school. She who was to be, in a few years, the pride of "Mosslands" must necessarily be a cultured lady. Mr. Avondale concluded to give her a four years' course at Madame Chelsea's school, in the suburbs of New York City.

One evening, as Mr. Avondale sat in his sumptuous parlor, the sound of merry children's voices coming from the lawn attracted his attention. On looking out he saw his daughter and Helen and Edgar Montague at play. The Montagues had been Mr. Avondale's neighbors for years and years. Helen, Edgar and Louisa had been lifelong friends. The children were near enough for Mr. Avondale to hear their conversation.

"I say, Louisa," said Edgar, "our governesses are coming next week; we shall commence our studies the first of September."

"Yes, two ladies are going to teach us," put in Helen.

"Who is going to teach you?" asked Edgar of Louisa.

"I don't know, I am sure. Papa has not mentioned anything of the matter to me, and I don't wish him to get a stranger here to teach me. I would rather have my papa teach me than any one else in this world. What are your teachers' names?"

"Madame and Mademoiselle Marea Trillcott," said Edgar.

"That is a queer name," said Louisa.

"Not so very queer, Louisa," said Helen.

"It is a French name, and they are real French ladies. For that reason papa engaged them as soon as they applied for the position; you know papa is of French descent."

"Yes," said Edgar, "but I'll bet neither of you know the meaning of the word Montague."

"No, Edgar, do tell us."

"Mont in French means mountain, Tague means high," explained Edgar. "Papa told me the meaning of our name the other day, so you see Montague means high mountain. Now Louisa, don't Mr. Edgar and Miss Helen High Mountain sound fine?" Both girls laughed at Edgar's drollery.

"I say, Louisa," went on Edgar, "I am nearly fifteen years old, quite old enough to go to college, instead of having ladies teaching me, no matter how Frenchy and smart they consider themselves. But let me tell you that I just mean to tease the life out of the two Frenchies during school hours, so as they will hand me over to papa, who will of course send me to college."

"Brother Edgar," said Helen, abashed, "how can you talk in such a manner?"

At his sister's reproof he began to whistle "Way down in Dixie Land," at which juncture

Thomas Jefferson came down the drive in the phaeton, and the two Montagues were soon on their way to "Fairlawn."

After they had gone Louisa at once sought her father to ascertain whether or not she would have a governess.

"Well, my little daughter, I have decided to send you to a good school, where you will remain until your education will have been completed. The name of the school is 'Chelsea Place,' and is conducted by a most excellent lady, Madame Chelsea."

"But, papa, I do not wish to leave you and my dear old home. I am sure I can learn enough here, by having you teach me."

"No, my daughter, when you reach a certain age you will enter society, and of course every one will expect the lady of 'Mosslands' to be highly cultured."

"But, papa, Helen and Edgar are to have a governess over at 'Fairlawn,' could I not study and recite with them?"

"No, my little daughter, I have already made all arrangements with Madame Chelsea. She expects you the first week in September. You will enjoy your school life very much, my dear, I know you will. The institution is along

the Hudson, in the suburbs of the greatest city in the United States."

"Oh! papa, that is so far away. How long will I have to remain at Chelsea?"

"Four years, my daughter. You are thirteen now; by the time you will have finished your course of study you will be just the proper age to make your debut."

A look of despair crossed Louisa's face. Four years seemed an endless length of time to her.

"Well, papa, as it is your wish of course I shall have to go, but it almost breaks my heart to think that in all that time I will not see my own dear papa, nor my lovely home."

"Oh! little one, I shall visit you at least twice a year, and as for Mosslands, it has stood for almost a century, surely it will stand four years longer."

This seemed to comfort her somewhat, and no more was said on the subject, for just then the supper-bell rang, and they repaired to the dining-room to enjoy a well-spread and dainty meal.

"Come, daughter," said Mr. Avondale, late in the evening, "sing to me a lot of good old Southern songs. When you are at 'Chelsea

Place' I wish you to pay particular attention to your music. You have inherited your mother's splendid voice, and also her talent for music."

Louisa complied with her father's request. One grand old Southern song after another rang out upon the still evening air. She sang until Chloe claimed that it was time for Miss Wesa to retire. "You know, honey, dat you must not lose beauty sleep."

Next morning bright and early Louisa rode over to "Fairlawn" to tell Helen and Edgar that she was to go away so soon. Edgar, who was filled with the spirit of adventure peculiar to boys of his age, thought it a capital idea to have a chance to see New York. Helen took the matter quite differently, and indulged in a good cry at the idea of losing her lifelong friend.

"Our governesses will arrive the first of next week. I am glad you will see them before you go away, Louisa," said Helen.

"So am I. Now, Helen, I hope you will get on famously with your studies. I am sure if you are obedient, and do your duty toward your teachers, that all will be well."

Thus the two girls consoled each other as

well as they could. The next time Louisa visited "Fairlawn" the teachers had arrived. She at once took a great liking to madame, but took a dislike to Marea as soon as they met.

"Come with me to my room, Louisa, I wish to ask you something," said Helen.

"Now," said Helen, after they had reached the room and closed the door, "do you know what I wish to ask you? Of course you don't know, but it is this: tell me honestly, do you like our teachers?"

"Well, Helen, I have fallen in love with madame, but I do not like her daughter, though I ought to be ashamed to say that I do not like her, as she is an utter stranger to me, and to all of us."

"Brother does not like mademoiselle either; I am afraid she will have trouble with him."

"I hope not," said Louisa. "Now, Helen, I mean to give you a little charge while I am away: I want you to take care of my little pony, to use as your own, until I return."

"Oh! Louisa, I shall certainly take great care of little Black Bess."

"Thank you, my own dear Helen," said Louisa, as she kissed her friend. "Now don't

forget to give Bess a lump of sugar every time you return from having a ride."

"I shall attend to that, my dearie, never fear," said Helen.

It was a distance of four miles from "Fairlawn" to "Mosslands," over a beautiful level country road. In after years Louisa looked back upon those rides and drives, to and fro from "Fairlawn," as some of the happiest hours of her childhood days.

The home of Louisa's mother was seven miles from "Mosslands." She had often expressed a wish to see "Meridith Hall," but Mr. Avondale always shrunk from the idea of going there, on account of the sad memories which such a visit would naturally revive. But now as Louisa was going so far away, Mr. Avondale made up his mind to take Louisa over to the Hall.

Thomas Jefferson was ordered to get ready the family carry-all, and the little party, consisting of Chloe and Thomas Jefferson, Mr. Avondale and Louisa, drove over to the Hall. Chloe was delighted at having a chance to visit "de ole plantation once more, where she had been born an' raised."

Mr. Avondale could scarcely repress his

emotion when the turrets and towers of "Meridith Hall" loomed into sight, this being the first sight he had had of the place since the night on which he had stolen his lovely bride. The good people who owned the Hall allowed the little party to go through the mansion at will. Chloe declared that everything appeared the same as the day on which she "left de deah ole place." The people who bought the Hall purchased the furniture also, and were content to allow everything about the house to remain the same as when the Meridiths lived there.

Mr. Avondale had never allowed his daughter to know that she had two uncles in existence. Old Chloe had also been cautioned not to mention their names to Louisa. The pictures of Robert and Paul hung in the parlor at "Meridith Hall." When Louisa asked Chloe whose portraits they were she was obliged to say that she did not know.

The reason Mr. Avondale left Louisa in ignorance to that effect was because Rob and Paul had never written to him since their sister's death, which of course led Mr. Avondale to suppose that they wished to keep up the family feud; therefore Mr. Avondale thought it proper never to make mention of their

existence to Louisa. Had James Avondale only known that they knew not of little Louisa's existence, no more than she knew of theirs, affairs might have proceeded quite differently.

The little company returned to "Mosslands" highly pleased with their visit to the Hall. Helen listened with deep interest to Louisa's description of her mother's home, hoping that some day that she too might visit "Meridith Place."

At last the day arrived for Louisa to leave "Mosslands." Helen and Edgar were over early in the morning to bid Louisa good-by. The two girls parted from each other with many bitter tears.

On arriving at Chelsea, madame was so kind that Louisa at once conceived a great liking for her, and after she heard Louisa sing she informed Mr. Avondale that mademoiselle had a wonderfully sweet voice. This bit of intelligence was quite pleasing to Mr. Avondale, who returned to Virginia thinking of the bright young girl who would return to grace his home four years hence.

Three years passed rapidly away, during which time Louisa learned to love Madame

Chelsea, and Chelsea Place school. Teachers and scholars alike loved the impulsive and warm-hearted young Southern girl. As for her studies, madame declared that the progress which she made, and most especially with her music, was simply marvelous. "Mademoiselle has a soul for music," the French teacher would say.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GYPSY'S FATAL DRUGS.

SCHOOL matters at "Fairlawn" had not progressed so well; Edgar had been declared unmanageable the second year after the Trillcotts took charge, and had been sent to college. Mademoiselle declared she had never met such an unruly boy. Helen did not like her teachers, on the strength of which she gave them no end of trouble. Madame and her daughter were almost in despair. Helen was becoming more unmanageable every day, and if they would be obliged to give her up, what then would they do for a livelihood?

"Mamma," said Marea, "do you remember the little pink and white balls which the gypsy gave me on the beach at Cape May?"

"Yes, daughter, I remember something of them," said Madame Trillcott.

"Well, mamma, I am tired of poverty; I believe I would far more rather be dead and

in my grave than have this sort of thing continue much longer. I have made up my mind to use the balls; there can be no harm in trying them at least."

"On whom, pray," asked Mrs. Trillcott.

"I mean to give the pink one to Mr. Avondale. If I can manage to give it to him we shall be all right, mamma; no more poverty for me. The old gypsy said that the love which the pink ball can produce will be lasting, and that the victim would become in time perfectly subservient to the will of the person who administered it. If the plan works well, and he is completely in my power, I shall have him make his will entirely in my favor. Of course, you know what I mean, mamma—after everything is arranged to my satisfaction, I shall give him the white ball, which will end his career in short order, while all the physicians in Richmond will stupidly declare that his death was caused by heart disease."

"But, Marea, old Haidee told you that no matter if she happened to be in Africa when you used them, that she would know of it, and that she would claim her reward."

"Nonsense, mother, how can you believe such rubbish!"

Madame Trillcott could not alter her daughter's determination.

"You know, mother, he is at Chelsea, visiting his daughter just now. When he returns I shall wait for an opportunity to put the first of my plan in execution."

Marea Trillcott did not have long to wait, for the first place Mr. Avondale visited on his return was Fairlawn. He had half a dozen messages for Helen and as many presents for her, tokens from his daughter to her friend.

It was Saturday morning when Marea saw him coming, and as she was not teaching, she ran to a little cupboard in her room, filled a glass with wine, into which she dropped the little pink ball, which, to her intense satisfaction, instantly melted away. She was down in the hall by the time Mr. Avondale entered.

"Oh! Mr. Avondale, so glad to see you," she said, feigning surprise. "I thought you were up in New York."

"I came home yesterday," said Mr. Avondale.

"I had some rare old wine upstairs, which I brought from France four years ago, and seeing that poor old daisy out there looking so weary, I was just about to take him a sip.

Now, monsieur, I beg of you to take it; you also look dejected, and this is such rare wine I know it will do you much good."

"It certainly was kind and thoughtful of you, Miss Trillcott, to think of giving the old darky a drink of wine. As you say it is such rare wine, I have no objection to offer against drinking some of it, if for nothing else but to please you."

As Marea watched him swallow the contents of the glass, she thought triumphantly to herself that he would do more than drink a glass of wine to please her before he would end his career. Marea then procured another glass of wine for the old darky, who wondered what on earth had come over the proud lady to think of his ever being fatigued. Marea then flew to her mother's room and told her what she had done.

"Marea, I fear, if the dose should prove successful, that old Haidee will soon have some means of finding our whereabouts."

"Nonsense," retorted Marea.

"But, Marea, I feel that it will not end well."

"We can wait and see whether it does or not. Once I am mistress of Mosslands all will be well, I am sure."

From the very hour in which Marea administered the gypsy's drug, James Avondale became a changed man. He became a puzzle to himself. For some reason, which he could not understand, he had strange longings to be near Miss Trillcott, contenting himself by sitting in a schoolroom at Fairlawn for hours at a time watching her teach Helen. He concluded at last that he was in love with Marea, yet, he told himself, it was not the same feeling of regard which he had had for Louisa Meridith.

Marea was not at all surprised when he asked her to become his wife, and we well know that she accepted the offer at once. The ceremony which made James Avondale and Marea Trillcott husband and wife was performed by a minister from Richmond in the parlor at Fairlawn. Immediately after the ceremony, Mr. and Mrs. Avondale, and Mrs. Trillcott drove over to the Avondale home, and Marea was installed as mistress of "Mosslands."

The society people of the county were surprised at the idea of Mr. Avondale marrying a woman of whom he knew nothing at all, and whom most of them dubbed an adventuress. None among his friends were more shocked than the Montagues. Helen was extremely

grieved to think that Marea Trillcott would be stepmother to her lifelong and devoted friend. Mr. Montague forbid his wife and daughter to mention the affair to Louisa in their letters to her.

“Her father is the proper party to inform her of the step he had taken.”

From the time Marea married Mr. Avondale she lost no opportunity to further her designs. The time for Louisa to return was drawing near, and Marea feared that a sight of his daughter might break the spell, and cause him to come to his sense of what he had done, in which his only child should be left penniless.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOUISA'S TROUBLES BEGIN.

AT LAST Louisa had graduated with high honors from "Chelsea Place;" she had learned all that could be learned there. Madame Chelsea sent a telegram to Mr. Avondale stating that his daughter would be home on the following evening.

Marea knew that the time had arrived for her to act. James Avondale must never see his daughter's face again.

James Avondale retired in his usual good health, on the night before his daughter's return, never to rise again.

He always kept a glass of water on a stand by his bedside, from which he drank frequently during the night. Into this Marea dropped the white ball which old Haidee had given her. When Mr. Avondale entered his sleeping apartment, feeling unusually thirsty, he

drank every drop of the water, thinking Chloe had placed it there as had been her custom.

On the following morning Marea aroused the household by screaming and wailing that her husband was dead, and it was indeed true; the master of "Mosslands" was no more.

The lovely old mansion was turned into a house of mourning. On the walls, on every picture, on the door-knobs, hung yards and yards of mourning goods. Marea ordered the brougham to be draped before sending it over to the station for Miss Louisa.

Poor Louisa! whose heart was so light at the possibility of reaching her lovely home once more, to be with her kind father, whom she loved so well.

When she stepped from the train at Richmond her heart gave a great bound of joy as she recognized Thomas Jefferson coming toward her, but her joy turned to consternation when she beheld the brougham all draped with mourning goods.

"Is there anything wrong at 'Mosslands,' Tom? I mean has anything happened to papa?"

The colored man burst into tears, saying: "Poah Massa Avondale is dead!"

At the terrible words Louisa Avondale felt as if her heart had truly broken, but hearts never break in this cruel world. The poor child's grief was terrible to witness when she stood beside the lifeless clay of her father, lying in the elegant parlor of her grand old home.

Still another shock was in store for her when Marea stood near, weeping and murmuring something concerning her dear dead husband.

Louisa set her great dark, terrified eyes upon her steadfastly as she asked :

"Woman, what do you mean?"

"I mean," said Marea, "that James Avondale, the man who lies here before me dead, was my husband. We were married more than a year ago."

"Oh, God!" murmured the unhappy child; "why has all this trouble come upon me at once?"

Poor Louisa then sank into an unconscious heap upon the floor.

When she regained consciousness she was lying on her own little bed, on which she had slept for so many years during her happy childhood days. Old Chloe was bending over her, saying:

“Poah little honey! How ole Chloe’s heart do ache for her!”

“Dear Mammy Chloe, how terrible it all is to think that my own dear papa is dead and a strange woman mistress of ‘Mosslands.’ What shall I do, Chloe? What shall I do?” wailed the grief-stricken child.

“Now don’t take on so, poah dear little honey, or you won’t be able ter attend de funeral to-morrer. It seems as if poah ole Chloe am left ter see de last ob de race laid away in de grabe. Now listen, Wesa! If you libs longer den I done lib promise me dat you will see dat dey lay me away in de ole buryin’-ground of St. Jude, where Massa and Missie Meridith and Mars James and his dear Missa Wesa am all ter sleep till dat great day. Mars James promised ter see dat I would be put dere. He did not dream dat he would go befo’ ole Chloe. Promise me dat you will see to dat, Wesa, faw I knows my days are nearly numbered.”

“I shall take care that St. Jude’s will be your last resting-place, Chloe.”

“God lub de dear little honey for dat promise,” said the old darky gratefully. “Do you know, Miss Wesa, dat you are de God’s

libin' image ob your deah mudder jess de time when she done 'loped wid Mars James, and le'me see, you are now jess about de age dat she was den, at de time she done 'loped. Yes, deah little honey, I done thought, when I sees you standin' by Mars James' corpse down dere in de parlo', dat Missa Wesa had come back from Pa'dise to mourn."

"Chloe, Chloe, I am real flesh and blood. Yesterday I was but a gay, happy child, to day I am but a piece of suffering humanity; I really believe my heart is breaking."

"No, honey," said Chloe, "hearts don't break in dis world, or ole Chloe's heart would done broke long ago, when your poah mudder died. Poah, dear Miss Wesa, she was kind and good to old Mammy Chloe, and when I meets her in Pa'dise I am glad I can tells her dat eben dough de wa' did come and free de slaves, dat I remained one jess de same as befo', and helped take care ob her little girl."

Just then Helen Montague appeared upon the scene, and helped all in her power to comfort her sorrowing friend.

The doctors had said, as Haidee foretold they would, that Mr. Avondale had come to his death by disease of the heart, which of course

stopped all wondering as to his sudden death, and on the day following Louisa's arrival all that was mortal of the master of "Mosslands" was laid to rest in the family burying-ground of St. Jude's.

Several days later Louisa Avondale was raving with fever. The terrible strain of her father's death had proved too much for her. For weeks and weeks the young girl lay at the point of death, faithfully nursed by old Mammy Chloe. Physicians despaired of her life, but luckily when the tide turned there was a change for the better, much to mammy's intense joy, and to Marea's annoyance, for she sincerely hoped that Louisa would die.

No sooner was Louisa out of danger when the fever was leaping wildly in old Chloe's veins. But alas! the poor old soul had not the strength, nor the youth, to help her fight against the terrible disease, and the poor old soul died, raving like a mad woman.

Louisa fulfilled her promise to the old darky. She too was laid to rest in St. Jude's, where lay so many of the Meridith race, whom the poor old slave had so long and faithfully served.

Marea had kept away from Louisa's room

during her illness, under the pretense that she was afraid of contracting the fever, when in reality she did not wish to see the child whom she had so bitterly wronged by stealing her fortune and murdering her father.

One morning, when Louisa was almost well, Marea entered her room. "Louisa," she said, "it becomes my unpleasant duty to inform you of the nature of the will which your late father made. In the first place he left his entire estate to me, and I am to provide for you."

"Do you wish me to understand, madame, that papa, dearly as he loved me, has cast me aside in his will, leaving me entirely dependent upon you, a mere adventuress. If such a will has been made, madame, you are the one who has been instrumental in having it done. There is a mystery somewhere; something strange has been going on at "Mosslands." Bear in mind, madame, that I, the proud daughter of the Avondales and the Meridiths, will never receive a single penny from you, never! I would rather work for my living a thousand times over," declared Louisa; the proud Southern blood of the young girl was all aglow from wounded pride.

Marea stood trembling from the sudden outburst of passion on the part of the young and beautiful girl, whom she supposed would be as gentle as a lamb.

Marea's courage returned quickly as she said : " How dare you, a mere dependent, talk to me in that manner ! Remember, Louisa Avondale, I am mistress of ' Mosslands,' and my will here is law."

" It seems to have been law," said Louisa, her dark eyes flashing defiance, " since you have at the same time stolen my father's love from me, as well as my fortune and my lovely home. The very first time I ever set my eyes upon you, about four years ago, when you first came to Virginia, I took a strange dislike to you ; no doubt it was because you were to cross my path. As I said before, you have stolen my wealth, but bear in mind you will never enjoy it—you will be snubbed by the gentry of the county. No one will give you credit for causing a gentleman to disinherit his only child."

A mocking laugh broke from Marea's lips as she said : " Is that all you have to say, you impudent little wizard ? Do you not really think that it is quite presuming of a little beg-

gar to talk in such a manner to the mistress of 'Mosslands'?"

"Marea Trillcott, the day will come when the wrong shall be righted, and you will awaken to the sudden realization that you are the beggar. As for me, I do not intend to beg; I am young and strong and quite able to earn my own living. Now, as your unpleasant duty, as you were pleased to term it, is over, you will do me a favor by leaving my room."

After she had gone Louisa soon decided which course to pursue. She ordered Tom Jefferson to hitch Black Bess—the pony which Helen took care of during her absence—to the phaeton. Her little trunk was soon packed and placed therein, and Louisa soon arrived bag and baggage at "Fairlawn."

The Montagues truly sympathized with the grief-stricken girl. Mr. Montague offered her a home at "Fairlawn" as long as she wished to stay.

Mrs. Montague and Helen were most eager to have her remain with them, and though she thanked and blessed the Montagues a thousand times over for their kindness, she felt it her duty to refuse.

"No, my dear kind friends, I have health,

strength and youth ; I think it is my duty to earn my own livelihood."

The Montagues tried hard to alter her determination, but to no avail.

Louisa wrote at once to Madame Chelsea, telling her of the great change that had befallen her old home, that she was penniless, and asking madame if there was a chance for her to get a position as teacher at Chelsea Place. Luckily a music teacher was needed, and madame knew that Louisa was the very one for the place.

This was more than Louisa had dared hope for, though when alone in her own room at "Fairlawn" she shed many bitter tears at the idea of leaving her dear old Virginia home, without hope of ever returning to live there permanently again. Yet she permitted no one to see her grieve, and did not for one minute waver in her purpose.

After bidding many sad adieux, Louisa found herself once more traversing the very road over which she had come such a short time before, only a light-hearted child. She was now returning to Chelsea a child in years, but transformed into a woman by grief and sorrow. Many a person on that great railroad train looked at the sweet young girl, with sorrow

stamped upon her face, made all the more impressive by her somber mourning garments, and wondered what was the tale of woe which plainly shone from her great dark eyes.

Madame Chelsea received Louisa back to "Chelsea Place" with great joy, and proceeded to make the unhappy child as comfortable as possible.

Louisa made a great success as leader of music at "Chelsea," which was, at that time, the most fashionable boarding school in the United States, yet she was not satisfied, because she felt as if she were only aiding the rich; the work which she did could only be grasped by children of wealth; she wished to enlarge her field of labor by helping a great many people, yet she could not conceive what it really was that she wished to do. She often mentioned her devise to "Madame," who encouraged the idea very little, because she could not bear the idea of losing Louisa. But there was no use for "Madame" to be selfish concerning the matter; there was no use in trying to keep a girl with a soul like Louisa Avondale's pent up in selfish work for a few wealthy people, when her whole course in life seemed to be for "the good, the true, and the beautiful."

CHAPTER IX.

LOUISA GOES TO BELLEVUE.

"A VISITOR, madame," announced a servant, as he handed her a card which bore the name of the Rev. Mr. Worthington.

"Such an unexpected pleasure to see you, Mr. Worthington," said madame as she entered the parlor.

"Thank you, madame," said the clergyman, "I hope you will be able to help me out of a dilemma; if I cannot obtain aid from 'Chelsea Place' then I fear I shall have to give up the ghost entirely."

"We will help you, sir, if it be in our power," said madame.

"Well, madame, our organist has been taken very ill, and as it is Saturday morning it is quite too late to make arrangements with any one in the city. Do you think, madame, that you could provide us with an organist for service to-morrow?"

"I think I can help you, sir. There is a young girl here who is fully able to act in that capacity for you to-morrow. I need not consult her on the subject. I can promise you definitely, for I know that she will be more than glad of an opportunity to help the good people of Grace Chapel. You may rest assured that she will be on time to-morrow."

Louisa Avondale, for it was none other than she, was glad to help the reverend gentleman out of trouble, and the next morning found her seated at her place in front of the organ.

When service commenced, and her clear sweet soprano voice rang out above the strains of the grand old organ, the listeners fancied the place to be filled with heavenly music.

Mr. Worthington was more than pleased with "Madame's pupil," as he styled Louisa. He was very much surprised when he learned that she was the chief musical instructor of the institution; he declared she looked more like one belonging to the juniors of the college than belonging to the corps of teachers. A great intimacy at once sprang up between Louisa and the minister's family. One Sunday morning Mrs. Worthington sent Louisa an invitation

to dine with them, an invitation which Louisa was pleased to accept. As the meal progressed Louisa informed the reverend gentleman that she wished to broaden her field of labor, that she felt sure there must be some vocation which she could choose in order to relieve suffering humanity, yet she had no idea just when, and where, and how, such work could be found.

"I think I can help you, Miss Avondale. Have you ever thought of becoming a nurse in a hospital?" said the minister.

"I never thought of any work of the kind, Mr. Worthington, but that is just the sphere of work which would, I know, please me greatly."

"Very well, Miss Avondale, I can procure a place for you at Bellevue Hospital."

"Oh! sir, I thank and bless you a thousand times," said Louisa.

"I am, indeed, glad to help you, Miss Avondale; the good intentions of young people ought to be encouraged."

Madame found that she would be obliged to part with Louisa, though she did so very reluctantly.

Louisa found life at Bellevue to be all that

she had wished for. It was, indeed, a boon to her young life to relieve the sufferer, which was her happy lot to do in a great many different ways, and also to whisper into the ears of the dying words which often blotted out despair, and brought peace and hope into their souls. A life devoted to such noble work is truly a beautiful life indeed.

CHAPTER X.

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR IS HARD.

WHEN Marea and Mrs. Trillcott found that Louisa had really left "Mosslands" their anger knew no bounds; together with being angry, conscience was smiting them. What was more, they knew that they would stand a good chance of being slighted by the gentry of the county. Whatever little peace of mind Mrs. Trillcott enjoyed, Marea enjoyed none at all—she was most miserable. Every sound—the sighing of the wind among the trees, the song of the bird, the screech of the owl, the rippling of the waters—all seemed to call out to her the same dreadful word "murderess."

"No matter," said Marea spitefully, "let the gentry snub us if they choose, we can find pleasure in travel."

"You are a clever schemer, Marea," said Mrs. Trillcott.

"I have always been that, mother, or I never would have become mistress of lovely 'Mosslands.' "

"But, Marea, what if we should happen to meet your Count Du Varri in our travels; he might claim you for his wife when he finds you are once more wealthy; you know that was his object in marrying you in the first place."

"Oh! mother, you are always annoying me with dismal forebodings. People would laugh at him and call him a fool if he would attempt such proceedings."

"But, Marea, he could prove that he married you, and if he were to do so the Avondale millions would no longer be yours, because your second marriage would not be legal."

"I shall manage all that, mother, if he should happen to cause tronble at any time." But in her own heart Marea firmly believed that her husband, whose name she did not even know, would never trouble her again. The conversation was brought abruptly to a close by a darky entering the boudoir.

"Please, Missa Avondale, dere am an ole beggar woman down at de doah, de kitchun doah. She won't done take nuffen from us black girls, she says she's 'fraid the missus will be

angry if she 'cepts anfig from we uns widout hearing you gib consent."

"I will go down and see that the honest old soul gets a plentiful supply of victuals," said Marea, as she followed black Sally down into the kitchen. Had she only known who the honest old soul was she would not have been so ready to go down to meet her. When she reached the kitchen door and saw old Haidee, the gypsy, standing before her, she almost wished the ground would open and swallow her, so great was her terror.

"Ah! lady," said the gypsy, in an undertone, "no doubt you have been thinking that old Haidee would never cross your path again. I see the little pink and white balls have done the work which I promised they would do. You have gained the aim for which you administered them. In other words you have received your reward, now I am here for mine. I see by your looks that you would like to deny having used them, but I know well enough that the little balls have done their work, Ida Stewart, Countess Du Varri, Marea Trillcott, Mrs. Avondale. Quite a number of names for one lady to possess in a lifetime," said the gypsy sarcastically.

“I do not know which name you prefer being called—Mrs. Avondale, no doubt. Well, Mrs. Avondale, we cannot come to terms here, but meet me at the edge of yonder copse to-night at ten o’clock sharp. Beyond the copse my tents are pitched, my tribe are there. Do not dare disappoint me; mind, promptly at ten. Now have my basket filled with victuals; no doubt the darkies are already wondering what this debate is about.”

Marea beckoned one of the darkies to take Haidee’s basket and fill it with bread and meat. The colored girl complied with her mistress’ request very reluctantly; darkies have a great aversion to gypsies. When they heard Haidee speak of being a gypsy every darky retreated as far as the kitchen wall would allow, consequently heard not a word of the above-named conversation.

Marea knew full well that she dared not disappoint the old gypsy; promptly at ten she stood at the edge of the copse, a lonely place nearly a mile from the mansion. The moon peeped out from behind the clouds occasionally. Marea was alone in a lonely place, her only companion being a guilty conscience. A sudden terror took possession of her, and she

was about to speed away across the fields to "Mosslands," when Haidee stood beside her, coming from Marea knew not whither.

"Mercy, Haidee!" screamed Marea, "where did you come from so suddenly? Only a minute ago I was alone—you must certainly have dropped from the clouds; or no, Haidee, I might know better. A creature as wicked and depraved as you never will be able to penetrate into the clouds."

"You are ditto in that respect, Mrs. Avondale; you are every bit as wicked as old Haidee. But I am not here to speak of our spiritual welfare, my time is far too precious to waste on such rubbish. As I told you to-day, you have had your reward, madame, by stealing the Avondale wealth from the true heir, now I am here to claim my share of the wealth. I told you that day at Cape May that I always claim my reward after the work has been accomplished. That is my business here to-night. You must either hand over the sum which I name, or stand exposure—now take your choice."

"Name the amount," said Marea in a husky voice.

"A thousand dollars now, and every time I see fit to demand the same sum."

Marea knew that remonstrance with the old hag would be of no avail.

"I have not the sum which you name with me to-night, Haidee, but come across to 'Mosslands' to-morrow morning, and I will give you the money. But remember, Haidee, you are not to come to me every two or three months for a thousand dollars. The Avondale millions would last no time, and what is more, if it were not for you and your wicked plots and evil designs I would not be a murderess this very minute."

"Mrs. Avondale, you mean were it not for old Haidee and her plots and designs, as you are pleased to style them, that you never would have become mistress of 'Mosslands.' I did not force you to use the drugs, you did it of your own free will. I shall be over for the money in the morning. As to when I shall trouble you again is entirely my affair." And with a bound the gypsy disappeared into the wood as suddenly as she had put in an appearance, leaving Marea standing terrified and alone in a lonely spot. She crossed the fields with flying feet. It was almost the midnight hour when she reached the mansion. She entered by a side door, and managed to

reach her room without awakening the darkies from their peaceful slumbers.

"Well, my daughter, how did you fare?" said Mrs. Trillcott, who had been awaiting her daughter's return to learn the result of the conference between her and the gypsy hag.

"Oh! badly enough, mother. The old hag declares that she will demand a thousand dollars from me every time she sees fit to do so, and if I refuse to give her the money at any time she will expose me to the world as a murderess, and what is more, she knows of my first marriage, because she called me Countess Du Varri in her conversation with me this morning, and although she did not intimate anything of the kind, I firmly believe she knows of his whereabouts. She will come over in the morning, and, of course, I will have to give her the gold which she claims she has a just right to have."

"Oh! Marea, I fear our troubles are only beginning."

The words sounded like a prophecy to Marea, who truly felt within herself that "the way of the transgressor is hard."

CHAPTER XI.

ROBERT AND LOUISA.

EIGHTEEN years have come and gone since Robert and Paul had first settled in South America, at the end of which time they find themselves enormously wealthy. Robert, however, is homesick; he therefore makes up his mind to sell his interests in South America, and return to live and die in his native state, good old Virginia. During all the long years Rob had never married. Paul promised Robert that if he (Rob) succeeded in re-buying the old homestead, "Meridith Hall," that he and his family would remove to Virginia. One fine morning in January, Robert set sail for New York, at which place business interests called him, before he could reach his native state. After a stormy voyage of nearly a month, Robert arrived at New York. As he was walking rapidly along East Twenty-fourth street, an old lady attempted to cross from one

side to another just as a carriage, drawn by two spirited horses, came dashing along. Rob saw that the old lady was in imminent danger, and immediately sprang to her rescue. He saved the old lady's life, but in so doing was thrown to the ground, receiving an ugly and painful wound on his arm, and sustaining injuries about his head. He remained conscious long enough to ask some one among the crowd to take him to a hospital. He was taken to Bellevue, and was carried to Louisa Avondale's ward.

It was a long time before Robert regained consciousness, and when he did open his eyes to what was going on around him he could not remember where he was, nor what had happened. A familiar form was sitting near the fireplace, in such a position that Robert could see her face from the bed on which he lay.

"My God!" thought Rob, as his memory slowly returned, and as he thought of the accident which had happened to him. "Did I die, and is my soul in another world, where the soul of my beautiful sister was launched at the time of her death, for as sure as I am a living or a dead man—I know not which—that is my sister who died in the long-ago sitting there near the fireplace."

It was some time before he could utter a word, so great was his bewilderment. At last he managed to say a few words, which brought the young nurse instantly to his bedside.

"In God's name, who are you, what is your name, and where am I?"

"Pray quiet yourself, my good man. Any excitement on your part will make your chance of life very slim by causing a hemorrhage of the wound on your arm; so please be quiet. You may rest assured that you are among friends."

Rob's astonishment and perplexity had only increased at every word she had uttered. Her voice as well as her looks was exactly like that of his sister Louisa. The young girl who stood by his bedside was the exact counterpart of his sister, just as she looked eighteen years ago on that never-to-be-forgotten night when she ran away from home. "Time has not changed her the slightest bit," thought Rob; "not the slightest bit in eighteen years."

"If you will only tell me your name, and whether or not you are real flesh and blood, I will be willing to keep quiet. You are the living image of my dear sister, who died about eighteen years ago."

Louisa could not help smiling at the absurd question asked of her as to whether or not she was real flesh and blood, and thinking he was a little feverish she answered his question, more to please him than for any other reason.

"I assure you that I am real flesh and blood. My name is Louisa Meridith Avondale."

"Then you are either my sister or my niece. Who were your parents? I am Robert Meridith, and my home was 'Meridith Hall,' near Richmond, Virginia. My sister married James Avondale, of 'Mosslands,' and you are her living image."

"Then," said Louisa, "you are indeed my uncle, for the lady whom you have just mentioned is my mother. She died when I was an infant. But the strange part of it all is that I never heard my papa say that my mother had a brother."

"She had two brothers—Paul, who is in South America, and myself."

"I really believe you are my uncle, my mother's brother. I now remember seeing your picture hanging in the parlor at 'Meridith Hall' the first and only time I ever was there. I asked papa and Mammy Chloe whose picture it was, but neither of them gave me the desired information."

"I cannot understand why it is that your father has kept you in ignorance of the fact that your mother had two brothers, but no doubt he has a reason for it. My dear, newly-found niece, I always thought that my sister died childless. Paul and I were as ignorant of your existence as you were of ours. What is more, Louisa, it is a great mystery to me why you, the proud daughter of the Avondales and the Meridiths, ever came to be a nurse at Bellevue Hospital."

"My dear uncle Robert, if I allow you to go on talking at this rate I fear the worst will happen, and I cannot bear the thought of losing you now when I have just found you. Now don't talk any more for the present, there's a good dear. I promise to tell you all just as soon as you are strong enough to listen. Now take your medicine, uncle dear," as she poured several drops from a small vial. He took it and was soon sleeping soundly.

When the physician came in to see the sick man he pronounced him out of danger, much to Louisa's satisfaction. Louisa then poured the strange story into the ears of the young doctor, who had been one of her favorites during her experience as nurse at Bellevue.

The two years which she was obliged to spend, after she took up her sphere of work at the hospital, was almost at an end. The young doctor and Louisa had been more than friends, they were lovers.

“Miss Avondale, Louisa, you do not know how dear you are to me. Now I fear I shall lose you; your uncle will no doubt take you away with him, back to Virginia, then what will life at Bellevue be to me? Promise me this very minute, Louisa, that you will become my wife in a year’s time at least. If you do not care for me now, you can at least learn to love me.”

“Dr. Montford,” said Louisa, raising her lovely eyes for the first time while he had been speaking, “surely my happiness has been completed to-day. Only yesterday I thought I was alone in the world, while to-day I have found a kinsman near and dear to me, my own dear mamma’s brother, and now the only man on this earth whom I could ever love asking me to become his wife.”

This shy confession launched the doctor into the seventh heaven of happiness, and so it was settled: Louisa Avondale was the promised wife of young Dr. Montford.

After several days Dr Montford pro-

nounced Robert to be in a fit condition to hear all Louisa had to tell him, which was the most pathetic tale he had ever listened to—after which Louisa shyly told him of her engagement to Dr. Montford.

Robert was well pleased with Louisa's choice. His only request was to delay the marriage for a time at least, as he did not wish to be separated from his beautiful niece, whom he considered a newly-found treasure, really more dear to him than he ever considered the gold mines which he owned in South America.

Robert was able to go downstairs the night on which his niece graduated as a professional nurse, and in that vast assemblage of the most cultured people of New York two gentlemen looked upon Louisa with especial pride, for they knew full well that she had performed a noble work, while the rest of the audience, who were less interested, commented much about her beauty and amiability of manner.

Robert Meridith could not bear to have his lovely niece remain longer at the hospital; he at last, after much pleading, gained her consent to return with him to Virginia.

Louisa would not leave New York without bidding adieu to her kind friends, Madame Chelsea and the Worthingtons.

CHAPTER XII.

ROB'S BETROTHAL.

MADAME promised faithfully to go down in Virginia to be present when Louisa married Dr. Montford, and good Mr. Worthington was engaged as officiating minister. Louisa and her uncle were soon on their way home. One week from the day on which they left New York a lady and gentleman was seen entering the churchyard of St. Jude, the silent habitation of the dead. The gentleman is Robert Meridith, the lady Louisa Avondale. They go to the family lot of the Meridiths, where Rob had not been since the day his father was interred, eighteen years before. On the monuments they found the following inscriptions: "Sacred to the memory of James Hastings Meridith, who died August the 2d, 1859. He was master of 'Meridith Hall,' and third son of Edward, Earl of Dorset." On the same monument read another inscription: "Sacred to

the memory of Eleanor Louisa Meridith, beloved wife of James H. Meridith, of 'Meridith Hall,' died March 26, 1841." On another: "Sacred to the memory of Louisa Meridith Avondale, beloved wife of James Avondale, of 'Mosslands,' — Co., Virginia, and daughter of Eleanor Louisa and James Hastings Meridith, of 'Meridith Hall,' departed this life June 15, 1860." "Sacred to the memory of James Avondale, son of Wellington and Elizabeth Avondale, of 'Mosslands,' and grandson of Lord Trevelyn Avondale, of England, died June 20, 1876."

"And now, Uncle Rob, we must not forget to look at Mammy Chloe's grave. She begged me to have her buried in this cemetery, where lay so many of a race she so faithfully served. I do not know exactly where it is, but we can find it easily enough, for I had a little gravestone placed over old Chloe's grave."

"And I am glad you did, Louisa; you certainly are a very kind and considerate girl."

They soon found the little headstone on which was written: "Sacred to the memory of Chloe, a faithful darky, who served the families of Avondale and Meridith faithfully until the last days of her life. Died August 14, 1876."

With hearts too full for utterance, Robert and Louisa left the cemetery, which held so many of their loved ones in its bosom. They entered the carriage and drove on to "Meridith Hall." As they went up the drive memories buried under the snows of eighteen years surged up in Rob's mind, and, strong man though he was, an unbidden tear would now and then roll down his cheeks.

"Meridith Hall" appeared to Rob as beautiful as it did the day on which he left it eighteen years ago. The good people who owned the place remembered Rob as being the former owner of the "Hall," and allowed him and Louisa to roam through the mansion at will. The same furniture was still there, the same pictures adorned the walls—everything seemed as familiar to Rob as if he had left it only yesterday.

Robert soon learned from the good people of the house that they were dissatisfied and wished to sell the place. They wished to sell it because the war had reduced their wealth a great deal, by causing them to lose their slaves; by burning fences which surrounded their estate; the Yankee soldiers had carried off their silver, and had even torn the silver buckles from the ladies,

shoes. True, they had lingered at the grand old place, loath to leave it, but now they felt obliged to sell the place to procure means to live upon. Robert at once offered to buy his old home again. The offer was accepted, and "Meridith Hall" was once more the property of the Meridiths.

Robert lost no time to inform Paul all that had occurred since he had returned to the States, and Paul, true to his promise, was soon on his way to Virginia. Louisa awaited the coming of the newly-found relatives with eager pleasure.

The Montagues were apprised of the presence of Robert and Louisa at the "Hall." They were rejoiced at Louisa's good fortune, and lost no time in going over to see her, it being only a distance of eleven miles from the "Hall" to Fairlawn. Louisa prevailed on Mrs. Montague not to take Helen back with her, but allow her to remain at the "Hall" until the arrival of her relatives from South America. Helen remained, and the two girls always looked back upon those days spent at the "Hall" as the beginning of a new life for them.

Louisa was not long in finding out that her uncle was in love with Helen, and that Helen

was not slow in reciprocating the same. Yet Louisa saw that her uncle did not push matters on account of the great difference between his age and Helen's. Louisa, however, determined to bring the affair to a climax as quickly as possible. Just how to go about the same was a puzzle to her, but fate determined to arrange matters for them.

The meadows at Meridith place were alive with wild flowers, as all meadows are in the springtime of the year. Louisa and Helen went out to gather some of the pretty treasures; after they had gathered a goodly share of them, they sat down on a moss-covered log to arrange them into bouquets. Robert, who was as fond of hunting as he was years ago, suddenly came upon the pretty scene, though unobserved by either of the girls. As he stood watching the two girls, and listening to their innocent talk, Helen dropped a few words which caused him to dodge behind a tree, for he knew what she had said would make him and her feel rather awkward if he were to make his presence known.

She had picked several pretty blossoms and arranged them into a bouquet, saying "These are for my darling Robert." The young girl

had not intended to make such a plain confession, even to Louisa, for she looked up and blushed violently.

“So you are in love with him, are you, you sly puss? I have known it all the while; do you think you could hide that from me, Helen? Now be an honest little ‘Injun’ and own to the truth.”

“Yes, Louisa, I do love him; but I am sure he don’t care a bit for poor little me. I know, of course, that he is many years my senior, but I love him as dearly as if he were exactly my own age.”

“Helen, Helen, my own dear lifelong friend, I am sure he cares for you, and I know that you would make him the sweetest little wife that he could find if he roamed the world over and over. The only trouble which I see ahead would be, how could I ever get used to calling you auntie?”

At these words the two girls indulged in a good hearty laugh, as they arose to go over to the “Hall.”

“So you love me, do you, my pretty dear?” said Rob, speaking to himself, as he watched the two girls cross the meadow. “Well, I am young enough to marry; my wealth shall make up for the difference in our years.”

Robert could not help smiling when Helen gave him the little bouquet, after having heard the confession which she made. Louisa was also smiling approvingly from across the room.

Robert pushed his suit, and soon the matter was settled. Louisa received the news with great joy, and by mutual consent the two girls agreed to have their marriages performed on the same day, but just when and where they were, as yet, unable to decide.

"Meridith Hall" presented a holiday appearance the day on which Paul was expected. Rob went to Richmond to escort them out to the Hall. Louisa stood on the veranda to meet the little party of South Americans.

"Louisa, this is your Uncle Paul and Aunt Vinette," said Robert, by way of introduction. "Here are your Cousins Rob and Paul, and this is Louisa, and last but not least, allow me to present you to little Virginia, who looks so much like you and your dear mother."

From the moment Louisa and her newly-found relatives met, a love, which lasted throughout the rest of their long, happy lives, sprang up between them.

"Now," said Louisa, turning to Helen, "it is my turn to introduce you, my dear cousins,

to your future aunt, and, Aunt Vinette and Uncle Paul, to your future sister."

"Uncle Robert to become a Benedict?" they all shouted in a chorus.

"I knew you would be caught in love's talons some day, Robert," said Aunt Vinette.

"And really I will have the two loveliest aunties in all the wide world," said Louisa Avondale.

The week which followed Paul's return was spent in merry making and feasting, in honor of the happy family reunion.

Robert went over to "Fairlawn" with Helen, when she returned, to inform Mr. and Mrs. Montague of their betrothal. Both were highly pleased and gave their consent without hesitation, thinking their daughter had very good taste in selecting a husband who was at the same time wealthy and of a very good family.

Louisa Avondale grew more and more fond of her cousins every day. She really could not tell who among them was her favorite. Robert, Jr., was very much, in ways and appearance, like his Uncle Robert, while Paul, Jr., favored his mother, who was a well bred Spanish lady. Louisa Meridith bore a striking

resemblance to a portrait of her Grandma Meridith, which hung in the parlor at the "Hall," where life-sized portraits of the Meridith wives hung for several generations. Little Virginia favored her Aunt Louisa, and consequently she was much like the Louisa Avondale of the present time.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GYPSY'S REVENGE.

ALMOST a year had rolled round since Marea Avondale had given Haidee, the gypsy, the thousand dollars, and she was beginning to congratulate herself on being rid of the old gypsy's demands, for a time at least. The season at the fashionable summer resorts were commencing, so Marea and Mrs. Trillcott lost no time in reaching Cape May as early in the season as possible.

"Now," thought Marea, after they were comfortably settled at Cape May, "if that wretched old hag goes to 'Mosslands' she will find us *non est*, and by the time she gets here we will have been gone somewhere else." But in her latter proposition she was to be disappointed.

A band of gypsies had pitched their tents near the corpse several days after Marea's de-

parture; it was Haidee and her tribe. The money which Marea had given her was spent during the winter ramblings through the South; they then wandered back to Virginia to get more money from her. On arriving at "Mosslands," and finding her gone, Haidee's anger knew no bounds.

"Where has your mistress gone?" she demanded of the frightened darky, who had told her that Mrs. Avondale was not at home.

"I think dey calls de place May's Cape, or Jane's Cape; somephing to dat 'fect."

"Gone to Cape May," said Haidee, as she turned and walked away. "Well, I guess I can go there also. She knew I would come about this time of the year, and no doubt she is flattering herself on having made good her escape, but I'll see if I shall cross half a dozen States to be outwitted by her."

Mrs. Avondale was enjoying the pleasures of the great watering-place with full zest. Her being wealthy and bearing the grand old name of Avondale caused her to be a general favorite, and though she met many of her old Philadelphia acquaintances she met them as strangers. Not one of them thought of her as Ida Stewart, the girl who dropped out of society nearly six

years before. No one dreamed of the wealthy Mrs. Avondale as being the victim of the Du Varri scandal.

After having spent a day crowded with an unusual amount of enjoyment Marea felt as if she would like to be alone for a time; so, instead of going down into the ballroom and joining the gay throng of merry dancers, she threw a light wrap around her and went out to enjoy a walk along the beach, to be alone for a time with her conscience and the roar of old ocean.

The beach seemed to be deserted. Not a soul was to be seen. Suddenly there came a sensation over Marea that some one was near—a sensation which we have all experienced at some time of our lives—and on turning to see if what she imagined were true she beheld old Haidee, the gypsy, standing before her.

“Mercy on us, Haidee, where did you come from so suddenly?”

“Oh, lady, I have traveled over the plains of many States, and the mountains of Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia, and endured great hardships to reach your home, lovely ‘Mosslands,’ which I helped you procure. You were not there. After which I was obliged to travel

over two more States to meet you. Traveled alone and on foot from 'Mosslands' to Cape May. Traveled alone along the dismal roads of Maryland and the more lonely ones of New Jersey. My object in coming to you is, as you well know, money. The money which you gave me last autumn has been spent, and before I leave Cape May, or before you shall dare leave it, you will pay me another thousand."

"Mercy, Haidee, have you no reason or sense? I cannot give you the money. I cannot afford it, and that is all I have to say."

"But I say you will pay it, no matter if you have to beg, borrow or steal it. You can afford to give it to me. You can loll in luxury here at Cape May, while the poor old woman who procured this wealth for you is obliged to go barefooted and hungry half of the time. If you do not pay me the money in short order you will soon find yourself a beggar."

"You will have to wait for several days, Haidee, because I have not the amount which you name here at present."

"Very well, Mrs. Avondale; but please get it here as quickly as you can, because my hungry tribe are anxiously awaiting me in the

copse near 'Mosslands.' I will give you three days to get the money for me. Now mind you, only three days!"

When Marea reached the hotel the ball was at its height.

"Why not go into the ballroom and drown my anxiety by mingling with the gay crowd," thought Marea as she looked toward the ballroom. She accordingly ascended to her room, donned her prettiest ball-dress, and was soon dancing as if she were the gayest of the gay.

Marea wondered if there were many hearts as heavy as hers under their gay costumes.

While Marea was engaged in the above thought the familiar voice of one of her lady friends arrested her attention.

"Mrs. Avondale, allow me to present you to Mr. Arnold."

When Marea looked at Mr. Arnold she could scarcely repress a scream, for before her stood Count Du Varri, her own husband. She knew that he had recognized her as quickly as she had recognized him.

"Come out upon the veranda, Ida," he said, as soon as the lady left them, "I wish to talk with you."

She obeyed him mechanically, wondering what new trouble was in store for her.

“Ida,” he said, when they reached the veranda, “I can never ask you to forgive me for deserting you; I was a fool and a coward, and I am heartily ashamed of my brutal conduct. I have searched for you everywhere, and now if you will only permit me I will make amends for my former conduct. At the time of our marriage I had not informed my relatives that I was about to take upon myself a wife, because I wished to surprise them by presenting my rich wife into their fashionable society. The family to which I belong is a proud Southern one, and when you became poor I knew that my mother would never receive you, therefore I saw fit to desert you; Oh, the shame of the cowardly act! I was reckless in my youth; nothing in the world could daunt me; all sorts of mad freaks I would undertake, such as styling myself a count, or a lord, but I have lived to get over my folly. Now, Ida, I ask and beg of you to forget the past and be my wife once more. We can have a minister go through the form of a marriage ceremony; I can pay him to keep his mouth shut about the affair, and who will know that we have been married for years? It can be done at once, if you wish, to-morrow,

right here at Cape May. Do you accept the proposition which I have just made, Ida?"

She had been turning the matter over rapidly in her own mind, and came to the conclusion that it was the very best she could do, as Arnold would be to her a powerful ally against old Haidee.

"I agree with you, Mr. Arnold."

"Edwin, you mean; my name is Edwin Arnold."

Marea then told him, without reserve, all that had taken place since the time of their marriage; the only part of the story which she failed to repeat was the way in which Mr. Avondale met his death, telling Arnold that he died of heart disease. She did not wish him to know that she was a murderess.

"I think I can devise a plan to rid us of the old gypsy. Wait until the ceremony is performed to-morrow, after which we can soon have old Haidee in a secure place, in some asylum for instance, then we can enjoy the Avondale millions to our hearts' content."

"How clever you are, Edwin," said Ida approvingly.

The next day a benediction was pronounced over them in the parlor of the — Hotel,

Cape May. Only one among the great number of people who witnessed the ceremony knew that it was not real, and that was Ida's mother, Mrs. Stewart, whom we have known so long as Mrs. Trillcott.

On the same evening Ida sent word for old Haidee to come to her rooms at the hotel, and receive the money which had been promised to her a few days previous. Arnold secreted himself in a closet, having a bottle of chloroform near at hand, and waited for the gypsy to arrive.

The old woman came in answer to Ida's summons, suspecting no wrong. While in conversation with Ida, Arnold pounced upon her, placed a plaster across her mouth, to prevent her from screaming, then applied a sponge, well saturated with chloroform, to her nostrils, and the old gypsy was soon rendered unconscious. Arnold then carried her down on the beach, where a carriage stood in readiness, into which he placed Haidee and drove to a more deserted part of the seashore, where two ruffians, hired for the purpose, were awaiting his coming, having a yacht in readiness. Haidee was placed therein, and the boat was soon making rapid speed toward Jersey City.

On reaching the city, Arnold, with his unconscious burden, entered a cab and was driven to a well-known insane asylum, where old Haidee was left to the mercy of the keepers, who were promised an ample monthly compensation for keeping her a close prisoner.

As soon as Haidee regained consciousness, and found where she was, she began to be on the alert to detect some means of escape, swearing to have revenge on the woman who was the cause of her imprisonment. Haidee was allowed to roam through the building at will, but the guards kept a close watch at the doors to prevent her from escaping.

Haidee had been a prisoner almost two weeks, and as she sat in her little low room, the picture of despair, the terrible cry of fire rang through the building. Haidee made haste to reach the kitchen. She could hear the keepers calling to their aids to save the inmates. No one seemed to notice Haidee; the guards were not at the kitchen door; her heart gave a great bound of joy as she stepped out upon the street, a free woman.

Haidee never stopped running until she reached a railway station, where she boarded a train going south. As the train rushed on-

ward Haidee began to realize that she was completely out of the toils of her enemies.

“Now for my revenge,” she thought; “you shall step down from your throne, my kind-hearted Mrs. Arnold” (Haidee had heard of her marriage at Cape May, and had seen and recognized Arnold as Du Varri.) “in less than two months’ time. What is more, care will be taken to see that old Haidee shall receive her reward for restoring the Avondale wealth to the rightful heirs.”

On arriving at Richmond, Haidee proceeded to the office of Mr. Shelby, one of Richmond’s most prominent lawyers, and who had been, during Mr. Avondale’s lifetime, the lawyer for the Avondale estate. After his death the lawyer received notice from Mrs. Avondale, for some reason best known to herself, that his services were no longer required.

“Well, my good woman,” said the lawyer kindly, for Mr. Shelby was a pleasant and genial gentleman, “can I help you out of trouble in any way? If I can I am sure I am at your service.”

“Mr. Shelby,” began Haidee, “you had at one time charge of the estate of James Avondale, of ‘Mosslands,’ had you not?”

Mr. Shelby acknowledged that he had been Mr. Avondale's attorney for years.

"Well, sir," went on Haidee, "have you never thought that it was a most singular coincidence that James Avondale disinherited his only child, leaving his entire estate to an adventuress?—the woman he married was nothing more."

"Yes, madame, I am forced to admit that the same has been a riddle which I have never been able to solve satisfactorily myself, and I am sure no one else has ever called upon me to solve it for them. It was indeed a strange thing for a man as good and noble as James Avondale to do, especially when he was so devoted to his child, seeming to live for and love her alone."

"Well, Mr. Shelby, I can give you an important clue, if you care to look the matter up, and restore the wealth to its rightful owner. I will give you the clue if you will see that I shall be rewarded for the trouble I have taken. If you take up the case there is no fear as to your losing it, I can assure you."

"Well, madame, I shall listen to what you have to say, and if I find there has been foul play I shall do all in my power to restore the wealth to its rightful owner."

Haidee explained to the lawyer all the incidents concerning Ida Stewart's first marriage. That Arnold had been alive and not divorced from her at the time of her marriage with James Avondale, the same would, of course, make her second marriage void, and of course she could not claim a penny of the Avondale wealth, because she was not James Avondale's widow in the eyes of the law. Haidee took care not to mention the active part she had taken in the affair for fear of inveigling herself into a trap.

The lawyer listened attentively to all Haidee had to say, knowing perfectly well that if all the woman had said were true that the case would prove a bonanza to him.

He then told her that Louisa Avondale was at "Meridith Hall," to which place he would go at once and have an interview with Robert Meridith, the young girl's uncle. He took Haidee's address and told her to call at his office as soon as he should send for her.

After reaching the "Hall," and explaining the matter to Robert, it was agreed upon to send for Mrs. Arnold and husband to come immediately to Richmond, where they would all meet; that is, Haidee, Robert and Paul, whom

it was agreed should appear for Louisa and Mr. Shelby, all to meet at the latter's office at Richmond, then if Mrs. Arnold would agree to give up all allegiance to the wealth the matter would be dropped; if not, the law would then have to decide the case.

Several days later the little party met at the lawyer's office. On seeing that it would be worse than useless to commence proceedings, Mrs. Arnold agreed to give up all claim to the wealth. She knew that the old gypsy's anger had been aroused, and that she was not to be trifled with, for fear she would proclaim to the world that Ida Arnold was a murderess. Haidee received a goodly reward for the services she had rendered, and was soon far away among her tribe, who hailed the return of their queen with great delight. Mr. Shelby also received a reward, and Louisa Avondale was again the lady of "Mosslands."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LADY OF "MOSSLANDS."

LOUISA AVONDALE had been kept in complete ignorance of the facts just related until after her claim was verified, when to her great astonishment she was informed that she was once more the lady of "Mosslands." "Do you know, Uncle Robert," said Louisa, "it is strange when I think of the dislike I took for Marea, the very first time I ever set eyes upon her, when she first went to 'Fairlawn' to teach Helen and Edgar. I suppose it was because she was destined to cross my path, but, Uncle Robert, I forgive her fully and freely for the wrong which she did me, now that the 'crooked has been made straight,' and if she really was my father's widow I would settle an allowance upon her which would be sufficient to keep her comfortably the rest of her lifetime, but as it is, I have no right to give her a copper; her

husband is the proper party to take care of her now."

"My dear niece, you are a noble girl, you are indeed," said Rob proudly, "and I am glad you have forgiven Mrs. Arnold for the wrong which she did you, for you know we must forgive if we wish to be forgiven."

"Dear Uncle Robert," murmured the happy girl, "you have been so kind to me." But Louisa did not know one-half of the wrong which Marea had done her, or she could not have forgiven her so freely. Louisa was deluged with congratulations from her vast circle of friends, none among them being more enthusiastic over her good fortune than the Worthingtons and Madame Chelsea. The Montagues drove over to the "Hall" after they had heard of the joyous news, and Louisa caressed her dear friend Helen, and both girls shed tears of gratitude over the many happy events which seemed to be crowding the present.

"Oh! my dear Louisa, I am so glad that we shall once more be neighbors, here in good old Virginia, where we spent our happy childhood days."

Through the influence of Robert and Paul

Meridith Dr. Montford received a call at Richmond, and it was decided that "Mosslands" should be their summer residence, the drive from Richmond being a short one, and most pleasant as well as beneficial to the doctor every night and morning during the summer months, but during the winter they would live in Richmond. Helen and Louisa decided to have the double wedding take place at "Mosslands," where they had spent so many happy hours during their childhood days, and the weeks preceding the time set for their wedding day were weeks of busy preparation for the two young girls.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DOUBLE WEDDING.

AT LAST the long-looked-for and all-important day arrived. "Mosslands," lovely "Mosslands," presented a most beautiful holiday appearance. The interior of the mansion was beautifully decorated with chrysanthemums and autumn leaves. When the two lovely brides, arrayed in white satin, stood in the center of the grand old parlor, with the two handsome, gallant-looking gentlemen by their sides, the scene was a pretty one, which was rendered solemn and grand when the Rev. Mr. Worthington pronounced the sacred words which bound them forever and ever as husband and wife "till death do us part."

After the reception Robert and Helen left "Mosslands" on an extended Northern tour, but Louisa was contented to remain at her dear old home, from which she had so long been an

exile. Robert and his bride did not return to "Meridith Hall" until nearly Christmas time. Their friends at "Mosslands" gave a ball in their honor on New Year's night. The grand old ballroom at "Mosslands" was thrown open to the guests for the first time in twenty years. The gay "Four Hundred" of Richmond society were in attendance, beautiful ladies and gallant gentlemen were there, scarcely a regret having been sent. All were anxious to respond to a summons, given out by the lovely and accomplished heiress of "Mosslands." Paul Meridith and his sons, who were just turning into manhood, were there, as were also his two lovely daughters. Little Virginia, who was just sweet sixteen, captured the heart of more than one gallant gentleman, but Edgar Montague was the favored one. Edgar had loved Louisa Avondale in his childhood days, a love which he had long since gotten over, however. Little Virginia was almost an exact image of her cousin Louisa; this was no doubt the cause of Edgar losing his heart once more. Edgar determined to know his fate that very night, and on looking at his dancing programme he found that she was to give him the very next waltz. He had not long to wait until a waltz

air struck up, and they were soon floating down the ballroom to the beautiful music of "My Queen."

"Come, Virginia, we will take a walk through the conservatory," said Edgar, after the waltz was ended. "They say the flowers there are very beautiful, and I have not been in there for many years."

Virginia consented, little thinking what was in store for her. Edgar pleaded so earnestly for her to become his wife that little Virginia at last consented.

The engagement between Edgar and Virginia was hailed with great delight by relatives on both sides of the house. It was more than any of them had ever hoped for, because Edgar had always declared that he would never succumb to the claims of the gentler sex enough to fall in love with one of them, but on becoming acquainted with little Virginia the brave resolutions which he had formed all crumbled away. He found that he had only the heart of a man, after all, but he made amends by saying that in little Virginia he had found his true ideal.

Edgar Montague was considered the catch of the season, being a rising young lawyer.

He had an office in Richmond, and had already distinguished himself by pleading several very prominent cases, so that the grand family name which he bore, and the talent which he possessed for the profession he followed, caused little Virginia to be looked upon as the lucky maiden of the season.

Robert Meridith, Jr., declared that there did not seem to be much else going on in the Meridith family lately but marrying and giving in marriage. He begged his sister Louisa to promise him that she would refuse every offer of marriage for at least a year from the night on which Virginia became engaged. Louisa promised that and more; she promised to remain free for at least two years. This promise made Rob very happy, for he had a horror of losing his two pretty sisters at once. Paul, Jr., teased his elder sister at the idea of letting little Virginia become engaged before her. Gentle Louisa took thoughtless Paul's teasing in very good part, declaring that she was in no hurry to decide her fate.

Edgar and Virginia ever afterward called the New Year ball the "Success Ball," because it was there that they became engaged. Six months after the "Success Ball," and in the

lovely month of June, when the roses were blooming profusely, and the birds were singing their sweetest and most joyous notes, a very pretty but quiet wedding took place at "Meridith Hall." The wedding was made a quiet affair at little Virginia's special request, only her nearest and dearest friends being present. Those near and dear friends were: Dr. and Mrs. Montford, Mr. and Mrs. Montague, Robert and Helen Meridith, Rob and Paul, Jr., Louisa Meridith, and last but not least, her father and mother.

Robert and Paul, Sr., would not hear to Virginia's being married at Richmond, where Paul and family had resided ever since Helen became mistress of the "Hall;" they wished the ceremony to be performed at their old home, around which clustered so many tender memories of bygone years. Edgar and Virginia spent a few happy weeks following their marriage at Old Point Comfort, after which they returned to their newly built and elegantly furnished home in Richmond, which was Mr. Montague's gift to his son on his wedding day, where they still live, enjoying a life of happiness and domestic tranquillity.

CHAPTER XVI.

LOUISA MERIDITH A HEROINE.

LOUISA MERIDITH'S two years of grace were almost to an end ; she had certainly kept her word thus far to her brother Rob, though there were many aspirants for her heart and hand, and no doubt Louisa would have kept her word to the letter had it not been for a very strange occurrence.

About the first of December, Mrs. Paul Meridith and her daughter Louisa, went up to Washington to visit friends, and also to do their Christmas shopping. While there they of course boarded at one of the fashionable hotels for which the national capital is noted, especially during the winter season. One night Louisa and Mrs. Meridith awoke to hear the awful cry of fire resounding through the hotel. Their room was already filling with smoke, and for one brief minute Louisa gave

herself up for lost ; but suddenly the courage for which Virginia girls are noted, returned to her. She knew also that she would be obliged to act on the strength of a very few minutes. She bade her mother dress hurriedly, while she packed their clothes into a huge bundle. She then took a long, strong rope from the bottom of the wardrobe, which she had seen lying in there on the day of their arrival. Louisa knew from the vast amount of smoke which was already in their room that escape through the corridors was worse than hopeless. She then tied the rope to the knob of the wardrobe, tied a loop in the end of it, into which she bade her mother place her foot, and in that manner the brave girl lowered her mother to the ground, amid the cheers of the people below. Of course Louisa had intended to draw the rope up again and escape by the same means, but alas ! when Mrs. Meridith reached the ground, the rope slipped from the place to which Louisa had fastened it, and fell to the ground, leaving her four stories high in the burning building without means of escape. As poor Mrs. Meridith looked up at the white, terrified face of her daughter, looking down beseechingly upon the crowd for help, she rec-

ognized the full extent of the awful peril in which Louisa was in. The poor lady begged piteously for some one to save her daughter's life, and the vast sea of human beings who were looking up at the sweet-faced girl at the window knew that some one would have to act in a hurry to save her, for the sides of the burning building were likely to cave in at almost any minute, yet no one seemed to take the perilous task upon themselves, when a strong-looking youth was seen crossing the roof of the hotel, until he stood directly over the window in which Louisa stood. He dropped a rope, which Louisa was not loathe to grasp as soon as she saw it ; she put her foot in the loop and was soon on *terra firma*. The young man made good his escape just as the walls of the burning building went in with a crash.

This noble young man had procured a rope and had acted while the rest of the crowd were spending time idly wondering what to do. After he had performed the noble deed he thought to make his escape without being known, for he did not wish to be lionized. But Mrs. Meridith had been too quick for him. She had ordered a policeman to bring him to her as soon as he had reached the ground.

Mrs. Meridith and her daughter could not thank and bless him enough for saving Louisa's life. As for Louisa, she fell violently in love with him as soon as she set her eyes upon him. He was tall and handsome, with dark-brown eyes and an honest countenance, and then along with all that he was the man who had saved her life. Had she not a right to love him, even if the goddess of beauty had forgotten him entirely? and although she knew not who the handsome stranger who stood before her might chance to be, nor what was his avocation, she knew that he was her true ideal, and when Mrs. Meridith obtained his promise to call on them during the evening, Louisa felt as if they could at least become friends, if nothing more.

The morning papers gave a full account of the terrible fire, and also the following article:

“Mrs. Paul Meridith and her daughter, Miss Louisa, of Richmond, Virginia, both prominent society people of the last-named place, were in the hotel, and narrowly escaped being burned to death. Miss Louisa proved herself a heroine by saving her mother's life, and also all their personal property. She lowered her mother to the ground from a fourth-story window by

means of a rope, which unfortunately slipped from the place to which she had fastened it, leaving the young girl no means of escape. For a few minutes the great mass of human beings who stood looking at the young girl and listening to her cries for help gave her up for lost, but suddenly a young man was seen crossing the roof of the building until he stood directly over her window. He lowered a rope, by which means the young girl was lowered to the ground in safety amid the cheers of the bystanders, the noble young man reaching the ground just as the sides of the burning building caved in with a great crash. The gallant young hero is Mr. Louis Blondell, son of the late Charles Blondell, who was well-known in Washington society. Young Blondell graduated with honors from West Point two years ago. While there he was noted for bravery and kindness of heart—two qualities which invariably go hand in hand. If our country had many more such noble soldiers its future destiny would certainly be safe.”

“Mamma,” said Louisa, when she had finished reading the article aloud to her mother, “the world cannot praise him enough, for he is truly a hero.”

The young soldier, true to his promise, called upon the ladies during the evening. Mrs. Meridith learned from him that his father and

mother were both dead, and that his only relatives in all the world were several distant cousins in the far West. Mrs. Meridith then persuaded him to go down into good old Virginia with them to spend his Christmas holidays, an invitation which young Mr. Blondell could not find an excuse for rejecting.

Great excitement prevailed among the Meridiths at Richmond when they heard of the narrow escape which Mrs. Meridith and her daughter had made from an awful death, and each and every member of the family assembled at Paul Meridith's residence to greet the little party from Washington on their arrival home.

Louis Blondell had often heard of the good old Virginia hospitality, and he was really glad for an opportunity to partake of it, and often, in the bright, happy years which followed, he loved to think of the delightful time when he first became acquainted with true Southern hospitality.

Christmas morning dawned bright and beautiful, and on an invitation from Robert and Helen all the members of the Meridith family went out to "Meridith Hall" to spend, not only the remaining part of Christmas day,

but the remainder of the week, and the grand old-time mansion certainly never looked more inviting than it did on that Christmas day. Peace and plenty reigned supreme. Many tender recollections of "Christmas Tides" in the long ago returned to Paul and Robert, Sr., on that day, and the Christmas tide of the present would often be remembered by the younger members of the family who were present at the happy family reunion.

Robert and Paul, Sr., were on the alert to have Louis Blondell catch their sister under the "Mistletoe boughs," but Louisa was also on the alert, and gave the boys quite a lot of trouble to catch her, but at last they won the game. Over the doors, over the windows, and in every available place, hung a mistletoe bough. Louisa thought she was alone in the drawing-room, as she stood by the window reading a letter from one of her school friends. But the boys, on hearing her coming, hid behind a screen, and she never became aware of their presence until Louis Blondell stood by her side. Paul and Robert retreated, calling back as they left the room, "Caught under the Mistletoe at last."

"Really, Louis," said Louisa, laughing as she

spoke, "if you hadn't saved my life, I would certainly box your ears well, but I can't thank and bless you enough for that noble deed, for you have no idea how sweet life really is until we are about to be robbed of it. No, Louis, if we only lived in the sixteenth century I would certainly make a knight of you by placing a crown of laurel upon your head."

"Louisa, you can knight me in the present age; place the crown of laurel upon my head, by promising to become my wife; that is the most glorious honor which you can confer upon me."

We all know the answer well enough, and Louisa told her soldier lover that, although she was very proud of his avocation, she would have consented to become his wife had he been only a common workman.

"Oh! dear brother, Rob, if it had only been New Year's day, instead of Christmas, my promise to you would have been kept completely, but you will forgive me, I know you will, for breaking my promise just a little bit?"

"You have kept your promise, my sweet little sister. I am glad now that I caused you to make that promise, because you might have

given your heart and hand long ere this to some one who might have been far less worthy of you than noble Louis Blondell."

Her brother Paul declared that he knew all along what would happen if little Grandma Meridith happened to be caught under the "Mistletoe bough."

At last the joyous Christmas holidays were over. Rob and Paul, Jr., returned to the University of Virginia, and resumed their studies, from which institution they graduated in the following June, where their father and uncle had graduated from, with honors, almost a quarter of a century before. They then proceeded to "Meridith Hall" to be present at the wedding of their sister Louisa, which event ended the wedding ceremonies at "Meridith Hall" for many a long year. Louisa's marriage was not a quiet affair, as Virginia's had been, but an event long to be remembered by the society people of Richmond and vicinity.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOUISA AVONDALE AND IDA ARNOLD.

MANY Christmas tides have come and gone, and as many happy family reunions had taken place since Louisa Meridith had been caught under the "Mistletoe bough;" many children now lend joy and brightness to the occasions; now there are the two Montford children from "Mosslands," Robert Meridith and Louisa Avondale Montford; little Louisa Meridith of the "Hall," the daughter of Rob and Helen, and little Helen Montague, Virginia's child, and last, but not least, comes down from Washington little seven-year-old Paul Meridith Blondell.

It was only two weeks from Christmas, and each lady was busily preparing gifts, which would, of course, be distributed at the "Hall" on Christmas day. And one morning as Louisa Montford, *nee* Avondale, sat in her cosy little morning-room, in her uncle's residence at Rich-

mond, busily engaged in arranging some pretty trifles for a Christmas gift, a colored girl entered the room, saying: "Please, Missa Montford, dey am a woman downstairs dat says dey am a woman dyin', and dat she done can't die widout seein' you; deed, missa, de woman in de hall down dere say it am de gospel truf."

Louisa arose and went down into the entrance hall. There stood a tall, gaunt woman, whose clothes were all in rags, and whose pinched face betokened the most abject poverty.

"Well, madame," said Louisa, "what can I do for you, or rather what is it that I can do for the woman who is dying? is she in need, or in what way can I help her?"

"No, ma'am," said the woman, "you can help her in only one way, and that is to go to her. She is a strange sort of a creature, and has only been in Richmond a short time, and all the rest of us in the tenement house know of her is that she is a widow, and that she is very poor, and is dying with consumption."

"I will go to her," said Louisa; "no doubt she is some one who has received some charity from my hands, and is eccentric enough to think she ought to thank me for it before she dies."

Dr. Montford happened to be at home. He accompanied his wife, and it was well he did, for Louisa did not dream who she was about to meet. The strange woman led Louisa and the doctor through dirty back streets and alleys, until at last they stood before a high, rickety old tenement house. They then climbed three flights of stairs. At last the woman pushed open a door, and Louisa and the doctor found themselves standing in the center of a large, comfortless room. No carpet covered the floor, the windows were dirty, admitting very little sunlight, a sickly-looking fire burned in the grate, and on a low bed in the corner of the room lay a wasted form, in the last stages of consumption, as both the doctor and Louisa knew at a glance. For a few minutes Louisa gazed with pity on the wan face, at the same time wondering where she had seen that face before.

"Louisa Avondale," said the woman faintly, "do you not know me?"

"My God! Marea, is it really you?"

"Yes, Louisa, but my days are almost numbered. Before another sun has set, I will have been in another world, but, Louisa, I could not die without seeing you. I have a dreadful con-

fession to make. I have wronged you more than you have an idea of, Louisa, yet I have a faint hope that you will forgive me, now that I am dying."

Ida Arnold then poured the whole dreadful story of the way in which she won James Avondale's love, of the manner in which he had died, keeping nothing back from Louisa, and adding that her mother had long since died of a broken heart.

Louisa listened to the dreadful story with horror shining from her great dark eyes.

"And your husband, where is he?" asked Louisa.

"Oh! the wretch, he deserted me long ago; but he too is dead, having met a terrible death in a railway accident. Mrs. Arnold has my little girl, little Annie, and may God in his mercy never allow her to know of her mother's awful sin."

The dying woman tried to say something more, but her speech was gone. Louisa then whispered to her that she forgave her; the dying woman understood her, for she opened her eyes once more, nodded her head and tried to smile.

"She is sinking fast," observed Dr. Mont-

ford, and in a few minutes Ida Arnold was no more.

Louisa Montford had her buried decently in a cemetery near Richmond, instead of letting the city authorities place her in the potter's field. Louisa would not hear of such a thing, because she once bore the name of Avondale.

Louisa wished the affair to be kept a secret, as no good would ever come of telling it, her two uncles, Dr. Montford and herself being the only ones who ever knew how James Avondale had met his death.

Louisa Avondale Montford still lives at lovely "Mosslands," surrounded by a bright family of dark-eyed little boys and girls, and she is still leading the kind of life which she begun in her early days, that of living only "For the good, the true, and the beautiful."

THE END.

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